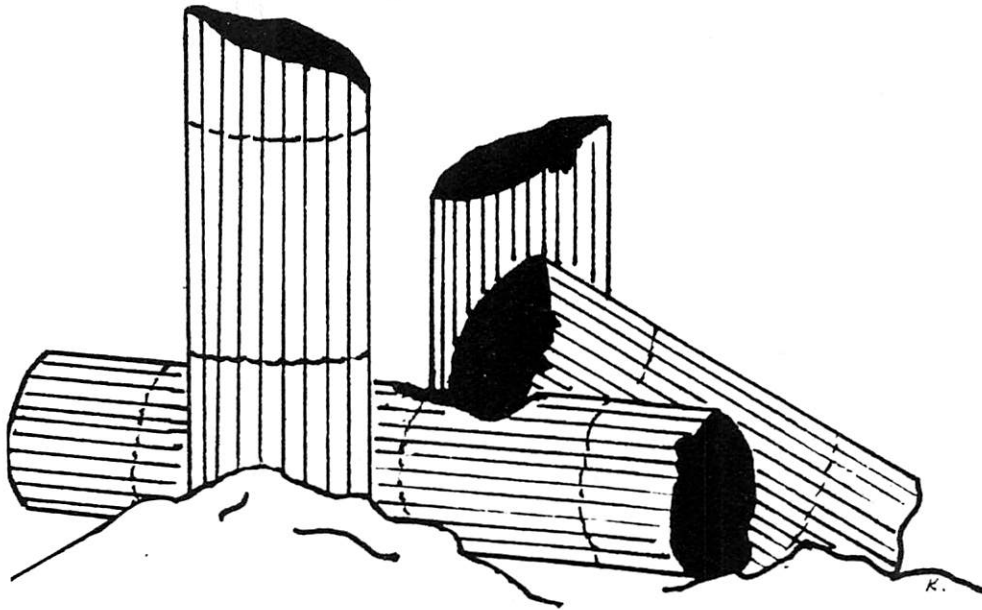


Samson

An Oratorio
by George Frideric Handel



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Orchestra Seattle/Seattle Chamber Singers
George Shangrow, Conductor

presents

SAMSON

An Oratorio
by
Handel

January 31, 1992
Meany Hall, UW Campus

Samson Paul Benningfield
Dalila Ellen McLain
Micha Mira Frohnmayer
Manoah Brian Box
Harapha Peter Kechley
Philistine/Israelite/Messenger Stephen Wall
Philistine/Israelite/servant Davida Kagen
Chorus of Philistines and
Chorus of Israelites Seattle Chamber Singers

George Shangrow, Conductor

This concert made possible, in part, by a grant from
The Washington State Arts Commission

Program Notes by Kay Benningfield

Chronologically, *Samson* falls exactly in the middle among Handel's most popular oratorios:

work	first performance
Alexander's Feast	1736
Saul	1739 (Jan.)
Israel in Egypt	1739 (Apr.)
L'Allegro...Penseroso	1740
Messiah	1742 (comp. 1741)
SAMSON	1743 (comp. 1742)
Belshazzar	1745
Judas Maccabeus	1747
Solomon	1749
Theodora	1750
Jephtha	1752

Before Handel composed *Messiah* and *Samson*, his most successful oratorio had been *Saul*. London audiences raved over *Saul's* exciting drama and bold characters, but had not responded as well to *Israel in Egypt*, which has few virtuoso arias and story characters (though it does have many of Handel's greatest choruses--much to the pleasure of Seattle Chamber Singers). *Messiah* doesn't have character roles either, and, though it was highly successful in Dublin, it fell a bit flat in London. *Samson* has lots of familiar characters, a good balance between solos and choruses, and tight drama; as well as spectacular music. It was a resounding success in London, receiving eight performances in its first year alone.

Samson is based on poetry by John Milton, and the libretto is by Newburg Hamilton (who also provided Handel with the libretto for *Alexander's Feast*). Milton's poem, *Samson Agonistes*, written in 1671, is loosely based on the 12th-16th chapters of the Book of Judges, but it is not as much concerned with Samson's glory, or his dramatic death when he pushes down the pillars of the pagan temple. Rather, it is concerned with the evolution of Samson's inner self, his moral development, and how he ultimately becomes the instrument of divine will. The conflicts that weigh upon Samson are nearly allegorical in nature: light vs. darkness, a father's expectations vs. a son's fate, trust vs. deception, and the Philistine god Dagon vs. the Israelite's Jehovah. *Agonistes* is the Greek word for an athlete competing for a prize in public games, but it also means spiritual and physical agony. The word has also come to stand for the struggle of Christ and every Christian. Samson, like so many of the Old Testament figures, is regarded by many to be a pre-figure of Christ. The word could also refer to the spiritual struggle within Samson.

There are a few interesting differences between Milton's poem and the Bible account of Samson. In

the Bible, Dalila was a "woman of pleasure". It was Milton (rumored to have been hen-pecked) who made her the wife of Samson. Milton also introduced the characters of Samson's father, Manoah (who was already dead by the time the Bible story begins), and the Philistine champion Harapha (who has no connection to the Bible's Samson story). The character of Micha was, however, created by Hamilton, not Milton.

Handel was treading new ground when he scored the title role for a tenor. Prior to this oratorio, heroic figures were customarily composed for castrati. Handel was clearly going for dramatic integrity of the character, and composed the role for a specific tenor known for his interpretive abilities. Handel's first Dalila was a well-known comic actress in London, and his casting of her in a sacred oratorio raised more than a few eyebrows. It was Handel's decision that the young man Micha should be sung by a contralto. He even stipulated that it should be sung by a woman, not a male alto. Handel was anxious to have the same contralto who sang in the Dublin performance of *Messiah* also sing in *Samson*, and he rescored some of the arias, as well as composing one or two new ones, especially for her.

Throughout his life Handel kept a fondness for this oratorio, and near the end of his life, when he (like Samson), had lost his eyesight, Handel would sit at the harpsichord and play the aria "Total Eclipse" with great emotion.

Handel's *Samson* has given influence to other composers of great oratorio. There is little doubt that Haydn had heard a performance of *Samson* while he was in London, and used the chorus "O first created beam" as inspiration for his own depiction of the first sunrise in *The Creation*. Mendelssohn, too, took inspiration from *Samson* when he composed *Elijah*. Both in structure and harmony, the choruses describing conflict between the worshipers of Baal and Jehovah in *Elijah* are very similar to those concerning Dagon and Jehovah in *Samson*. Orchestra Seattle, the Seattle Chamber Singers and our patrons have the great opportunity to further study these comparisons this season because on May 23rd we will perform Mendelssohn's *Elijah* here in Meany Hall.

The story of the Oratorio
synopsis by KB

Act I. Following the opening Sinfonia, the story begins with Samson in prison, blind, and in chains (these are Handel's own directions, even though he never intended to have this work staged). Samson observes that this rare day of rest from toil is due to his Philistine captors' celebration of the feast of their pagan god Dagon. He hears the crowd of Philistines shout their excitement (Awake the trumpets' lofty sound), and individual Philistines extolling the greatness of Dagon. Samson reflects on the cruel reversal of his fortune. Why was he ever born if he was to end up like this? Torments from abuse and oppression are not limited to head or breast, but find ways into the very inmost mind and rob the soul itself of rest.

A friend from Samson's better days, Micha, comes to visit Samson and is astounded by the sunken man before him. Micha compares Samson's broken body and spirit to the state of the Israelites. Samson grieves that he did not keep Heaven's great trust, but instead revealed the secret of his strength to a woman. He asks Micha what good is strength if you have a weak mind. Micha asks Samson what is worse, imprisonment or blindness. Without hesitation Samson says "Oh! Loss of sight!...Total eclipse...the sun and moon are dark to me." (The chorus of Israelites sing of God's creation of light.) Samson tells Micha that even if he could have his sight back, he couldn't lift his head from shame. He had betrayed his God. Micha says that all men make mistakes, but he has always wondered why Samson chose a woman not from their own homeland. Samson moans "Oh, that I had!"

Micha tells Samson that another has come to see him--his father Manoah. Manoah is shocked to see Samson in so beaten a state. An aria by an "Israelitish" man cautions how fleeting fame can be, and how easily lost. Manoah tells how he had prayed for children and Jehovah gave him "such a son!" All men had envied him, but now, who would be a father in his stead? His song, which was once one of joy, is now of sorrow. Samson replies that the sorrow is all his for having betrayed the mysteries of God to "feminine assaults". Manoah counters saying the greater sorrow is that Dagon is being celebrated while the living God is blasphemed and scorned. Samson agrees, saying that is the very thing which gnaws inside him, but forbids him release through death. Samson calls to God (Why does the God of Israel sleep? Arise!...so the heathen will hear your thunder).

The Israelites praise Jehovah as the one God, alone over all the earth. Manoah asks Samson why it is necessary for him to remain in prison, for he cannot be considered a threat any longer. Samson replies that continued imprisonment is a just punishment for his crime against God. Micha reflects upon the blissful release that death might bring. The chorus of Israelites praise the glories of heaven, and that heaven is the triumph over death and time.

Act II. Micha encourages Samson not to give up. The great Samson once seemed destined for greatness, and hadn't he shunned all fame once offered to him? Samson, still dejected, says that even though he spurned material wealth, he laid his strength "in lust's lascivious lap." Manoah retorts "Trust yet in God!...let none His secret actions scan." Micha and the chorus of Israelites call upon God to "behold thy servant in distress."

Micha sees someone coming, gaily dressed, with an entourage of attendants--it is Dalila! Samson begs to not let her near him. But she is weeping, and approaches Samson saying it is from love for him that brought her. With great anger, Samson tells her to get out! Dalila begs him to listen--that she thought his fate was both their faults: her curiosity for secrets and his giving in to her questions. Samson responds with "How cunningly the sorceress displays her own transgressions...." Dalila pleads with Samson, telling him that she still burns with love for him; that it was from love and jealousy that she sought to keep him beside her. Samson demands whether it was love or raging lust that made her do what she did? "In vain you strive to cover shame with shame....How great the curse, how hard my fate to pass life's sea with such a mate!" Dalila again begs forgiveness and promises to take care of him for the rest of his life. She urges him to take what little pleasure he might yet have in life. He forgives her, but at a distance, and tells her to be satisfied with that and leave. Dalila asks if she might approach him and Samson says "Not for thy life, lest fierce remembrance wake my sudden rage to tear thee limb from limb." They charge each other as being traitors to love. Dalila finally leaves. Samson says he believes God sent her to aggravate him. He and Micha discuss the dangers of women, and the chorus chimes in with a mocking, sententious taunt on marriage.

If the upset from Dalila weren't enough, Harapha shows up. Harapha is the giant champion of the pagans and the god Dagon. Harapha introduces himself to Samson and says that it is such a pity that they never met in battle in order to try each other's strength. Samson warns him to not be fooled by his

present appearance; that the way for Harapha to know Samson is to "taste" his strength. Harapha says he disdains to fight a blind man, and it would be a poor victory to end Samson with one blow. Samson, getting a little riled, says essentially--oh, yeah? and tells Harapha to grab a weapon and come within his reach, that his strength comes from the living God. Harapha laughs at Samson. Samson asks if Harapha came to his cell just to torment him, or would he fight? Samson demands for him to get out or suffer his wrath, and Harapha warns Samson not to presume too much of his god.

Micha realizes that something has awakened in Samson and suggests that the two champions battle for the honor of their god. The chorus of Israelites (in splendid 6-part harmony) prays to Jehovah to save them and show that He is near. Harapha (in a sparse recitative) commands Dagon to arise. A chorus of Philistines sings of how their songs and dances prove Dagon is the greatest, that he should protect them, and sweep the race of Israel from their land. Then, in a remarkable combination of quartet and chorus, the followers of Jehovah and Dagon "battle" for dominance.

Act III. Micha is still with Samson in the Philistine prison. Micha sees that Harapha approaches again. Samson says he is not afraid of him or any of the enemy. Harapha says he wants public proof that Samson's strength is beyond the human race, and challenges Samson to fight him in the games held in great Dagon's honor. Samson refuses; as a Hebrew it would be profane for him to attend such a contest and play their fool. Harapha essentially accuses Samson of being a coward. Samson reconsiders, wondering if his refusal is also to again deny God. Micha urges him to be cautious, but knows that only God knows how all this will end. The chorus of Israelites pray to God to arm Samson with thunder, lest Israel's champion die. Samson feels his strength returning. Micha says it's just in time, because Harapha was again coming. Harapha says if Samson doesn't come this time, they will bring "engines" to move him. Samson says that won't be necessary; that he agrees to come. Samson bids farewell to his friend and father, and promises that he will let nothing shame God or himself. Samson prays for the spirit of God to come upon him and help him make Jehovah's glory known; then he predicts that by that very evening his enemies, and he, will be dead. Micha prays to God for Samson's victory and salvation. The chorus of Israelites echo the prayer.

Manoah approaches saying to Micha that he hopes to gain liberty for his son after the great fight.

They are interrupted by a Philistine (echoed by a chorus) who jeers at Samson that now comes before them in chains. Manoah only wants to protect his son from further harm, and to care for Samson: he says that as long as he has eyes, Samson will never want for light. Micha hears the cheering of the Philistines and fears that Manoah's hopes are in vain. Manoah begins to comfort Micha, but is interrupted by a terrible, horrifying noise! The Philistines cry out of death and ruin! A Hebrew messenger runs to Micha and Manoah to tell them that Samson is dead, but not from the enemy. Samson, with his great strength returned, had brought the pillars of the temple down upon all their heads. Shaken, Manoah declares that such revenge is glorious, but dearly bought. Micha (and the chorus of Israelites) laments the loss of Samson, but is heartened to know that his dear friend has now, at last, forever "closed his eyes." Manoah goes to retrieve and clean Samson's body for burial. (Death march)

Micha and Manoah sing of their glorious hero and hope that his memory will inspire the sons of Israel for generations. The chorus of Israelites repeat their song. Manoah and Micha urge all not to lament, but to praise Jehovah. An Israelite takes up the hymn "Let the bright Seraphim..." and the oratorio ends with a full chorus that "sounds Jehovah's praise in an endless blaze of light."

Orchestra Seattle/Seattle Chamber Singers
George Shangrow, Conductor

presents

Johann Sebastian Bach's

St. Matthew Passion

Good Friday
April 9th, 1993
7:00 pm

Meany Hall
UW Campus

Call 682-5208
for ticket information

Samson by G. F. Handel

libretto by Newburgh Hamilton
based upon the poem *Samson Agonistes*
by John Milton

Part I

In a Philistine prison.
Samson is blind and in chains

Samson: This day, a solemn feast to Dagon held, relieves me from my task of servile toil; unwillingly their superstition yields this rest, to breathe heaven's air, fresh blowing, pure and sweet.

Chorus of Philistines: Awake the trumpet's lofty sound! The joyful sacred festival comes round, when Dagon king of all the earth is crowned.

Philistine Woman: Ye men of Gaza, hither bring the merry pipe and pleasing string. In solemn hymn and cheerful song be Dagon praised by every tongue.

Chorus of Philistines: Awake the trumpet...

Philistine Man: Loud as the thunder's awful voice in notes of triumph, notes of praise, so high great Dagon's name we'll raise: that heaven and earth may hear how we rejoice!

Philistine Woman: Then free from sorrow, free from thrall, all blithe and gay with sports and play we'll celebrate his festival.

Chorus of Philistines: Awake the trumpet...

Samson: Why by an angel was my birth foretold, if I must die, betrayed and captived thus, the scorn and gaze of foes. Oh, cruel thought! My griefs find no redress. They inward prey like gangrened wounds, immedicable grown.

Torments, Alas! are not confined to heart, or head, or breast; but will a secret passage find into the very inmost mind, with pains intense oppressed, that rob the soul itself of rest.

Micha: Oh change beyond report, thought, or belief! See, how he lies with languished head, unpropped, abandoned, past all hope! Can this be he? Heroic Samson? whom no strength of man, no fury of the fiercest beast could quell! Who tore the lion, as the lion tears the kid! Ran weaponless on armies clad in iron, useless the tempered steel, or coat of mail!

Samson: Whom have I to complain of but myself, who heaven's great trust could not in silence keep, but weakly to a woman must reveal it!

Micha: Matchless in might! Once Israel's glory, now her grief! We come, (thy friends well know) to visit thee!

Samson: Welcome my friends!

Micha: Which shall we first bewail, thy bondage or lost sight?

Samson: Oh, loss of sight, of thee I most complain! Oh worse than beggary, old age, or chains! My very soul in real darkness dwells!

Total eclipse! No sun, no moon, all dark amidst the blaze of noon. Oh glorious light! No cheering ray, to glad my eyes with welcome day! Why thus deprived thy prime decree? Sun, moon, and stars are dark to me!

Chorus of Israelites: Oh first created beam! And thou, great word: let there be light! And light was over all. One heavenly blaze shone round this earthly ball: to thy dark servant, life, by light afford!

Samson: Ye see, my friends, how woes enclose my round: but had I sight, how could I heave my head for shame? Thus, for a word, or tear, divulge to a false woman God's most secret gift, and then be sung, or proverb'd for a fool.

Micha: Here comes thy reverend sire, Old Manoah, with careful steps and look as white as down.

Samson: Alas, another grief that names awakes.

Manoah: Brethren and men of Dan, say, where is my son, Samson, fond Israel's boast? Inform my age!

Micha: Assignal now in low dejected state, as in the height of power, see where he lies!

Manoah: Oh miserable change! Is this the man, renowned afar, the dread of Israel's foes? Who, with an angel's strength, their armies duelled, himself an army! Now unequal match to guard his breast against the coward's spear!

Israelite (Man): Oh ever failing trust in mortal strength! And Oh, what not deceivable and vain in man!

God of our fathers, what is man? So proud, so vain, so great in story! His fame a blast, his life a span, a bubble at the height of glory! Oft he that is exalted high, unseemly falls in human eye.

Manoah: The good we wish for often proves our bane. I prayed for children, and I gained a son, and such a son, as all men hailed me happy. But who'd be now a father in my stead? The blessing drew a scorpion's tail behind: this plant (select and sacred for a while, the miracle of all!) was in one hour ensnared, assaulted, overcome, led bound, his foes derision, captive, poor, and blind!

Thy glorious deeds inspired my tongue, whilst airs of joy from thence did flow. To sorrows now I tune my song, and set my harp to notes of woe.

Samson: Justly these evils have befallen thy son; sole author I, sole cause. My grief for this forbids mine eyes to close, or thoughts of rest. But now the strife shall end: me overthrown, Dagon presumes to enter lists with God, who, thus provoked, will not connive, but rouse his fury soon, and his great name assert; Dagon shall stoop, ere long be quite despoiled of all those boasted trophies won on me.

Why does the God of Israel sleep?
Arise with dreadful sound, with
clouds encompassed round! Then
shall the heathen hear Thy thunder
deep. The tempest of Thy wrath now
raise, in whirlwinds them pursue, full
fraught with vengeance due till
shame and trouble all Thy foes shall
seize!

Micha: There lies our hope! True
prophet mayest thou be, that God
may vindicate his glorious name; nor
let us doubt whether God is lord, or
Dagon.

Chorus of Israelites: Then shall
they know, that he whose name
Jehovah is alone, o'er all the earth
but one, was ever the most high, and
still the same.

Manoah: For thee, my dearest son,
must thou meanwhile lie, thus
neglected, in this loathsome plight?

Samson: It should be so. Why
should I live? Soon shall these orbs
to double darkness yield.

My genial spirits droop, my hopes
are fled; nature in me seems weary
of herself; my race of glory run, and
race of shame: death, invocated oft
shall end my pains, and lay me
gently down with them that rest.

Chorus of Israelites: Then round
about the starry throne of Him who
ever rules alone, your heavenly
guided soul shall climb: of all this
earthly grossness quit, with glory
crowned for ever sit, and triumph
over death, and thee, Oh time!

Manoah: Despair not thus! You
were once God's delight, his destined
from the womb, by him led on to
deeds above the nerve of mortal arm:
under his eye abstemious you grew
up, nor did the dancing ruby,
sparkling, outpoured, allure you from
the cool crystalline stream.

Samson: Where'er the liquid brook
or fountain flowed, I drank, nor
envied man the cheering grape, but
what availed this temperance, not
complete against another object more

enticing? I laid my strength in lust's
lascivious lap.

Manoah: Trust yet in God! thy
father's timely care shall prosecute
the means to free thee hence;
Meantime, all healing words from
these thy friends admit.

Samson: My evils hopeless are!
One prayer remains: a speedy death,
to close my miseries.

Micha: Relieve thy champion, image
of Thy strength, and turn his labors
to a peaceful end!

Return, Oh God of Hosts! behold thy
servant in distress! His mighty griefs
redress, nor by the heathen be it told.

Chorus of Israelites: To dust his
glory he would tread, and number
him among the dead.

Micha: But who is this, so bedecked
and gay, comes this way sailing like
a stately ship? 'Tis Dalila, thy wife.

Samson: My wife? my traitress!
Let her not come near me!

Dalila: With doubtful feet and
wavering resolution I come, Oh
Samson, dreading thy displeasure; but
conjugal affection led me on,
prevailing over fear and timorous
doubt; glad if in ought my help or
love could serve, to expiate my rash,
unthought misdeed.

Samson: Out! thou Hyena! 'Twas
malice that brought thee here! These
are the arts of women false like thee,
to break all vows, repent, deceive,
submit; then with instructed skill
again transgress. The wisest men
have met such bosom snakes,
beguiled like me, to ages an example.

Dalila: I would not lessen my
offense, yet beg to weigh it by itself.
What is it then but curiosity? A
small female fault greedy of secrets,
but to publish them. Why would you
trust a woman's frailty then, and to
her importunity your strength? A
mutual weakness mutual pardon
claims.

Samson: How cunningly the
sorceress displays her own
transgressions, to upbraid me mine!
I to myself was false, ere thou to me;
Bitter reproach! but true. The pardon
then I to my folly give, take thou to
thine!

Dalila: With plaintive notes and
amorous moan, thus coos the turtle
left alone.

Samson: Your charms to ruin led
the way, my sense depraved; my
strength enslaved; as I did love, you
did betray. How great the curse!
how hard my fate to pass life's sea
with such a mate!

Samson: Ne'er think of that! I
know thy warbling charms, thy trains,
thy wiles, and fair enchanted cup:
their force is nulled; where once I
have been caught, I shun the snare;
these chains--this prison-house, I
count the house of liberty to thine.

Dalila: Let me approach, at least,
and touch thy hand.

Samson: Not for thy life, lest fierce
remembrance wake my sudden rage
to tear thee limb from limb. At
distance I forgive: depart with that.
Now triumph in thy falsehood; so
farewell!

Dalila: Thou art more deaf to
prayers than winds or seas; thy anger
rages an eternal tempest. Why
should I humbly sue for peace, thus
scorned, with infamy upon my name
denounced? When in this land I shall
ever be held the first of womankind,
living or dead, my praises shall be
sung at solemn feasts, who saved my
country from a fierce destroyer.

Dalila: Traitor to love! I'll sue no
more for pardon scorned, your threats
give o'er!

Samson: Traitress to love! I'll hear
no more the charmer's voice, your
arts give o'er!

(Dalila leaves)

Micha: She's gone! a serpent
manifest; her sting discovered in the
end.

Samson: So let her go! God sent her here to aggravate my folly.

Samson: Favored of heaven is he, who finds one true. How rarely found! His way to peace is smooth.

Chorus of Israelites: To man God's universal law gave power to keep the wife in awe. Thus shall his life be ne'er dismayed, by female usurpation swayed.

Intermission

Part II

Micha: No words of peace, no voice enchanting fear, a rougher tongue expect: here's Harapha, I know him by his stride and haughty look.

Harapha: I come not, Samson, to condole thy chance; I am of Gath, men call me Harapha: Thou knowst me now. Of thy prodigious might much have I heard, incredible to me! Nor less displeased, that never in the field we met, to try each other's deeds of strength: I's see if thy appearance answers loud report.

Samson: The way to know, were not to see, but taste!

Harapha: Ha! dost thou then already single me? I thought that labor and thy chains had tamed thee. Had fortune brought be to that field of death, where thou wroughtst wonders with an asses jaw, I'd left thy carcass where the ass lay thrown.

Samson: Boast not of what thou wouldst have done, but do!

Harapha: The honor certain to have won from thee I lose, prevented by thy eyes put out; to combat with a blind man I disdain.

Honor and arms scorn such a foe, though I could end thee at a blow. Poor victory, to conquer thee, or glory in thy overthrow! Vanquish a slave that is half slain: so mean a triumph I disdain.

Samson: Cam'st thou for this, vain boaster? yet take heed! My heels are fettered but my hands are free. Thou bulk, of spirit void! I once again, blind and in chains, provoke thee to the fight!

Harapha: Oh Dagon! can I hear this insolence, to me unused, not rendering instant death?

Samson: Go, baffled coward, go, lest vengeance lay thee low; in safety fly my wrath with speed.

Harapha: Presume not on thy god, who underfoot has trod thy strength and thee, at greatest need.

Micha: Here lies the proof: if Dagon be thy god, with high devotion invoke his aid; his glory is concerned. Let him dissolve those magic spells that gave our hero strength: then know whose god is God: Dagon, of mortal make, or that Great One whom Abram's sons adore.

Chorus of Israelites: Hear Jacob's God, Jehovah, hear! Oh save us, prostrate at thy throne! Israel depends on thee alone, save us and show that thou art near!

Harapha: Dagon, arise! attend thy sacred feast! Thy honor calls, this day admits no rest.

Chorus of Philistines: To song and dance we give the day, which shows thy universal away. Protect us by thy mighty hand, and sweep this race from out the land.

Choruses of Israelites and Philistines: Fixed in his everlasting seat (Jehovah/Great Dagon) rules the world in state. His thunder roars, heaven shakes, and earth's aghast; remain in steadfast gaze: (Jehovah/Great Dagon) is of gods the first and last.

Micha: More trouble is behind, for Harapha comes on amain, speed in his step and look.

Samson: I fear him not, nor all his giant brood.

Harapha: Samson, to thee our Lord thus bid me say: "This day to Dagon we do sacrifice with triumph, pomp, and games; we know thy strength surpasses human race: come then, show some public proof to grace this solemn feast.

Samson: I am an Hebrew, and our law forbids my presence at their vain religious rites.

Harapha: This answer will offend! Regard thyself!

Samson: Myself! my conscience and my internal peace! Am I so broke with servitude to yield to such absurd commands? To be their fool, and play before their god? I will not come!

Harapha: My message, given with speed, brooks no delay.

Presuming slave, to move their wrath! For mercy sue, or vengeance due dooms in one fatal word thy death! Consider, ere it be too late, to ward the unerring shaft of fate.

Micha: Reflect then, Samson, matters now are strained up to the height, whether to hold or break. He is gone, whose malice may inflame the Lord's.

Samson: Shall I abuse this consecrated gift of strength, again returning with my hair, By vaunting it in honor to their god, and prostituting holy things to idols?

Micha: How thou wilt here come off surmounts my reach; tis heaven alone can save, both us and thee.

Chorus of Israelites: With thunder armed, great God arise! Help Lord, or Israel's champion dies! To thy protection this thy servant take, and save, oh save us for Thy servant's sake!

Samson: Be of good courage; I begin to feel some inward motions, which do bid me go.

Micha: In time thou hast resolved! Again he comes.

Harapha: Samson, this second summons send our Lords: "Art thou our captive, slave and public drudge, yet dare dispute thy coming when we send? Haste thee at once, or we shall engines find to move thee, thou wert a solid rock!"

Samson: Vain were their art if tried; I yield to go.

Micha: So mayest thou act as serves His glory best.

Samson: Let but that spirit (which first rushed on me in the camp of Dan) inspire me at my need: then shall make Jehovah's glory known! Their idol gods shall from his presence fly, Scattered like sheep before the God of Hosts.

Micha: With might endued above the sons of men, swift as the lightning's glance His errand execute, and spread His name amongst the heathen round!

The holy one of Israel by thy guide, the angel of thy birth stand by thy side! To fame immortal go, heaven bids thee strike the blow: the Holy One of Israel is thy guide

Chorus of Israelites: To fame immortal go...

Micha: Old Manoah, with youthful steps, makes haste to find his son, or bring him some glad news.

Manoah: I come, my brethren, not to seek my son, who at the feast does play before the Lords: but give you part with me, what hopes I have to work his liberty.

Philistine (Man): Great Dagon has subdued our foe, and brought their boasted hero low: sound out his power in notes divine, praise him with mirth, high cheer and wine.

Chorus of Philistines: Great dagon...

Manoah: What noise of joy was that? It tore the sky.

Micha: They shout and sing to see their dreaded foe now captive, blind, delighting with their strength.

Manoah: Could my inheritance but ransom him, without my patrimony having him the richest of my tribe.

Micha: Sons care to nurse their parents in old age; but you--your son!

Manoah: How willing my paternal love the weight to share of filial care, and part of sorrow's burden prove! Though wandering in the shades of night, whilst I have eyes he want no light.

Micha: Your hopes of his delivery seem not in vain, in which all Israel's friends participate.

Manoah: I know your friendly minds, and -- (*a symphony of horror and confusion*) -- Heaven! what noise! Horribly loud, unlike the former shout.

Chorus of Philistines: Hear us our god, or hear our cry! Death, ruin, fallen! No help is nigh. Oh mercy, heaven, we sink, we die!

Messenger: Where shall I run, or which way fly the thoughts of this most horrid sight? Oh countrymen, you are in this sad event too much concerned!

Micha: The accident was loud, we long to know from whence.

Messenger: Let me recover breath; it will burst forth.

Manoah: Suspense in news is torture: speak them out!

Messenger: Then take the worst in brief--Samson is dead.

Manoah: The worst indeed!

Messenger: Unwounded of his enemies he fell; at once he did destroy, and was destroyed; the edifice (where all were met to see) upon their heads, and on his own he pulled!

Manoah: Oh lastly overstrong against thyself! A dreadful way thou tookest to thy revenge: glorious, yet dearly bought!

Micha: Ye sons of Israel, now lament; your spear is broke, your bow's unbent. Your glory's fled! Amongst the dead great Samson lies, forever, ever closed, his eyes.

Chorus of Israelites: Weep Israel, weep a louder strain; Samson, your strength, your hero, is slain!

Dead March

Manoah: Come, come! no time for lamentation now. No cause for grief: Samson, like Samson fell, both life and death heroic. To his foes, ruin is left. To him, eternal fame.

An Israelite (Woman): Let the bright seraphim in burning row, their loud uplifted angel trumpets blow. Let the Cherubic host, in tuneful choirs, touch their immortal harps with golden wires.

Chorus of Israelites: Let their celestial concerts all unite, ever to sound his praise in endless blaze of light.

The End.

Acknowledgements

Our thanks to Brian Box for his help in reconstructing orchestral performance parts, and to Kay Benningfield for typesetting the program.

Our Guest Artists

Paul Benningfield, before moving to the Puget Sound area, was active in the Midwest, performing concert and oratorio repertoire with the Cleveland Orchestra and Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra. In the Pacific Northwest he has been featured as a soloist with Orchestra Seattle/Seattle Chamber Singers and the Seattle Symphony, as well as Seattle Opera and Tacoma Opera. His career has also included professorships at Michigan State University, the University of Akron, and Eastern Illinois University, where, in addition to his teaching, he was highly regarded for his recital singing. Paul was the recipient of the Artist Award of the National Association of Teachers of Singing, and the Central Region first prize in the Metropolitan Opera National Auditions.

Ellen McLain is a versatile soprano, comfortable in many musical genres. She sang the role of Silver Dollar in Seattle Opera's 1992 production of *The Ballad of Baby Doe*, and has been a soprano soloist with Orchestra Seattle/Seattle Chamber Singers several times in the past two seasons. She appeared with us as soloist in Handel's *L'Allegro ed il Penseroso*, Haydn's *Missa Solemnis*, and in our *Abendmusik Series* of Bach Cantatas.

Mira Frohnmayer studied at the Frankfurt Hochschule and in Berlin, Germany. She received music degrees from the University of Oregon and the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston. Her previous appearances with Orchestra Seattle/Seattle Chamber Singers include the world premiere of Carol Sams' oratorio *The Earthmakers*, and the *St. John Passion* and *Christmas Oratorio* by J. S. Bach. Ms. Frohnmayer has won critical acclaim from the press in Europe and the United States for her solo appearances in numerous oratorios, festivals and recitals. She has recorded works with Daniel Pinkham and Helmuth Rilling, and is presently chair of vocal studies at Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma.

Brian Box is a native of Washington and received his Master of Music degree from Western Washington University. Mr. Box has appeared frequently with Orchestra Seattle/Seattle Chamber Singers as a soloist in cantatas and oratorios; most recently in *Messiah* (Dec. '92). Among his credits are performances of Brahms' *Four Last Songs* with the WWU Orchestra and the leading role in Dominic Argento's opera *Postcard from Morocco* at the University of British Columbia. He is a regular performer with *Northwest Opera in Schools, Etc.* and Seattle Opera's education program, and made his Seattle Opera solo debut as the Corporal in *Daughter of the Regiment*.

Peter Kechley has a long relationship with Orchestra Seattle/Seattle Chamber Singers. He, along with George Shangrow, was one of the founding members in 1968. Since that beginning Mr. Kechley has appeared with OS/SCS as a soloist in many cantatas, oratorios, masses and entertainments. He also has premiered roles in several operas composed by Carol Sams, including *Daddy's Money*, *Swampet*, and *Benji*—in which he played seven different characters! Kechley's understanding of drama within music gives him a fine facility with the art of recitative singing and aria interpretation. Peter Kechley is the bass soloist at University Unitarian Church.

Stephen Wall has appeared many times with Orchestra Seattle/Seattle Chamber Singers. He was our tenor soloist in Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9* and *Missa Solemnis*, and in Handel's *Messiah* for the past several seasons. He created the role of Vladimir in Carol Sams' opera *Heaven*, and he appeared in the title role of the OS/SCS production Monteverdi's *The Return of Ulysses*. His credits with Seattle Opera include roles in *Tannhauser*, *Die Meistersinger*, and *War and Peace*. Mr. Wall has been a featured soloist with the Seattle, Spokane, Vancouver B.C. and Sapporo (Japan) Symphonies. He is currently a professor of voice at Pacific Lutheran University.

David Kagen was the leading soprano soloist in the opera house of Wuppertal, Germany for four years. Since her return to the United States she has kept a busy schedule of solo, concert and opera performances in Seattle and throughout the country. Her soloist appearances with Orchestra Seattle/Seattle Chamber Singers include Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*, Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*, and Mozart's *Requiem*. She has also appeared as a soloist with the Seattle Choral Company and Bellevue Philharmonic Orchestra. Across the country, Ms. Kagen has appeared with the Greater Buffalo Opera as Gilda in *Rigoletto*, and with the Youngstown Symphony as Oscar in *A Masked Ball* and as soprano soloist in *Carmina Burana*.

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Margaret Alsup
Kay Benningfield
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