

Israel In Egypt

by George Frideric Handel.

Performed by
**Orchestra Seattle &
Seattle Chamber Singers**
**George Shangrow,
Conductor**

Sunday, October 5, 1997
University Christian Church
4731-15th Avenue NE, Seattle, Washington

*He gave them hailstones for rain;
fire mingled with the hail ran along upon the ground.*
Ps. cv. 32; Exodus ix. 23, 24

George Frideric Handel's PROGRAM NOTES

By the time of his death in London in 1759, 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. It includes one complete oratorio, *Messiah*, (which we will present on December 20 and 21), a "funeral march" from another oratorio, *Saul*, (which you will hear us perform on November 16), a chorus from a third oratorio, *Judas Maccabaeus* (which we performed last season), an air from the *Serse*, the *Water Music*, and the *Fireworks Music*.



In this 1997-98 season, OS/SCS takes great pleasure in presenting six of this composer's powerful and moving works for orchestra, soloists, and chorus. Five of these are very rarely performed, and we thus offer you an unprecedented opportunity to become more deeply and widely acquainted with the breathtaking music of one of choral art's greatest geniuses—George Frideric Handel.



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.

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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.

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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."

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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: It had no expensive staging and no overpaid, egotistical, quarreling Italian star sopranos. It did have 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 Oct. 1, 1738 (almost exactly 259 years ago!), 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 (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 of 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).

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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" con-

text 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 today. 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.

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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 us with of 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 unsettling, 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 corpus 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.

Streatfield 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 tours de force in music history. Revel in its tremendous, sweeping sonorities, and rejoice with the Children of Israel in their marvelous deliverance!



PERFORMERS

Music Director and Conductor

George Shangrow

Soloists

Kia Sams, soprano. Kathryn Vinson, mezzo-soprano. Stephen P. Wall, tenor. Brain Box, bass. Greg Abbott, bass

Seattle Chamber Singers, Chorus I

Sopranos: Barbara Anderson, Sue Cobb, Kiki Hood, Lorelette Knowles, Caroline Pachaud, Kelly Sanderbeck, Liesel Van Cleeff

Tenors: Ralph Cobb, Timothy Lunde, Tom Nesbitt, Ben Waldman

Altos: Laila Adams, Jane Blackwell, Wendy Borton, Christine Hackenberger, Adrienne Thomas McCoy, Suzi Means

Basses: Peter Henry, Mike Owen, Tim Ramos, Richard Wyckoff

Seattle Chamber Singers, Chorus II

Sopranos: Debra Browning, Susan Dier, Cinda Freece, Jill Kraakmo, Nancy Lewis, Alexandra Miletta, Paula Rimmer

Tenors: Alex Chun, Jon Lange, Dave Spurling

Altos: Sharon Agnew, Cheryl Blackburn, Penny Deputy, Laurie Medill, Veronica Parnitski, Nedra Slauson

Basses: Greg Abbott, Brian Box, Andrew Danilchik, Dick Etherington

Orchestra Seattle

Violins: Dajana Akropovic-Hobson, Sue Herring, Deborah Kirkland (concertmaster), Fritz Klein (principal second), Pam Kummert, Avron Maletzky, Gregor Nitsche, Leif-Ivar Pedersen, Janet Showalter

Violas: Saundrah Humphrey (principal), Shari Peterson, Stephanie Read, Sharon Tveten

Cellos: Evelyn Albrecht, Julie C. Reed (principal first orchestra), Valerie Ross, Matthew Wyant, principal second orchestra)

Bass: Allan Goldman (second orchestra), Josephine Hansen (first orchestra)

Oboe: M. Shannon Hill (principal), Taina Karr

Bassoon: Jeff Eldridge (principal), Judy Lawrence

Trumpet: Craig Penrose, Gordon Ullmann (principal)

Trombones: David Brewer, Cuaehtemoc Escobedo (principal), David Holmes

Percussion: Owen Bjerke, Daniel Oie

Harpischord: Robert Kechley, Lisa Lewis

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LIBRETTO

PART 1: "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. *Exodus i. 8, 11, 13*
- 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. *Exodus ii. 23*
- RECITATIVE: The 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. *Ps. cv. 26, 27, 29*
- CHORUS: They loathed to drink of the river. He turned their waters into blood. *Exodus vii. 18, 19*
- AIR: Their land brought forth frogs, yea even in their kings chambers. *Ps. cv. 30*
- CHORUS: He gave their cattle over to the pestilence; blotches and blains broke forth on man and beast. *Exodus xi. 9,10*
- CHORUS: He spake the word, and their came all manner of flies and lice in all their quarters. He spake; and the locusts came without number, and devoured all the fruits of the ground. *Ps. cv. 31,34,35*
- CHORUS: He gave them hailstones for rain; fire mingled with the hail ran along upon the ground. *Ps. cv. 32; Exodus ix. 23,24*
- CHORUS: He sent a thick darkness over the land, even darkness which might be felt. *Exodus x. 21*
- CHORUS: He smote all the firstborn of Egypt, the chief of all their strength. *Ps. cv. 36,37*
- 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. *Ps. lxxvii. 53; cv. 37*
- 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. *Ps. cvi.9*
- CHORUS: He led them through the deep as through a wilderness. *Ps. cvi. 9*
- CHORUS: But the waters overwhelmed their enemies, there was not one of them left. *Ps. cvi.11*
- 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. *Exodus xiv.31*

PART 2: "SONG OF MOSES"

- 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. *Exodus xv.1*
- DUET: The Lord is my strength and my song; He is become my salvation. *Exodus xv.2*
- CHORUS: He is my God, and I will prepare Him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt him. *Exodus xv. 2*
- DUET: The Lord is a man of war: Lord is His name. Pharaoh's chariots and his host hath He cast into the sea; his chosen captains also are drowned in the Red Sea. *Exodus xv. 3,4*
- CHORUS: The depths have covered them: they sank into the bottom as a stone. *Exodus xv. 5*
- CHORUS: Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power; Thy right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces the enemy. *Exodus xv. 6*
- CHORUS: And in the greatness of Thine excellency Thou hast overthrown them that rose up against Thee. *Exodus xv. 7*
- CHORUS: Thou sendest forth Thy wrath, which consumed them as stubble. *Exodus xv.7*
- 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. *Exodus xv.8*
- 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. *Exodus xv.9*
- AIR: Thou didst blow with the wind, the sea covered them; they sank as lead in the mighty waters. *Exodus xv.10*
- 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. *Exodus xv. 11,12*
- 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. *Exodus xv.13*
- 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. *Exodus xv. 14,15,16*
- 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. *Exodus xv. 17*
- CHORUS: The Lord shall reign for ever and ever. *Exodus xv. 18*
- RECITATIVE: For the horse 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. *Exodus xv. 19*
- CHORUS: The Lord shall reign for ever and ever. *Exodus xv. 18*
- 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. *Exodus xv. 20, 21*
- SOLO & CH: Sing ye to the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath He throwⁿ into the sea. *Exodus xv. 21, 18*