GEORGE FREDERICK HANDEL
MESSIAH

Saturday, December 4, 2021
7:30 pm

COMBINED UNIVERSITY CHOIRS
and ORCHESTRA
with student soloists

Dr. Marc Ashley Foster, conductor
Messiah (1741)
George Frideric Handel
Born February 23, 1685 in Halle, Germany
Died April 14, 1759 in London

George Frideric Handel’s sacred oratorio Messiah is without question one of the most popular works in the choral/orchestral repertoire today. In what has become an indispensable Christmas tradition, amateur and professional musicians in almost every city and town throughout the country perform this work as a seasonal entertainment, and are rewarded with the satisfaction of taking part in one of the great communal musical events. The text for Messiah was selected and compiled from the King James version of the Bible by Charles Jennens, an aristocrat and musician/poet of modest talent and exceptional ego. With Messiah, Jennens seems to have outdone himself in compiling a libretto with profound thematic coherence and an acute sensitivity to the inherent musical structure. With the finished libretto in his possession, Handel began setting it to music on August 22, 1741, and completed it 24 days later. He was certainly working at white-hot speed, but this didn’t necessarily indicate he was in the throes of devotional fervor, as legend has often stated. Handel composed many of his works in haste, and immediately after completing Messiah he wrote his next oratorio, Samson, in a similarly brief time-span.

The swiftness with which Handel composed Messiah can be partially explained by the musical borrowings from his own earlier compositions. For example, the melodies used in the two choruses “And He shall purify” and “His yoke is easy” were taken from an Italian chamber duet Handel had written earlier in 1741, “Quel fior che all’ alba ride.” Another secular duet, “Nò, di voi non vo’ fidarmi,” provided material for the famous chorus “For unto us a Child is born,” and the delightful “All we like sheep” borrows its wandering melismas from the same duet. A madrigal from 1712, “Se tu non lasci amore,” was transformed into a duet-chorus pair for the end of the oratorio, “O Death, where is thy sting,” and “But thanks be to God.” In each instance, however, Handel does more than simply provide new words to old tunes. There is considerable re-composition, and any frivolity that remains from the light-hearted secular models is more than compensated for by the new material Handel masterfully worked into each chorus.

Over-enthusiastic “Handelists” in the 19th century perpetuated all sorts of legends regarding the composition of Messiah. An often-repeated story relates how Handel’s servant found him sobbing with emotion while writing the famous “Hallelujah Chorus,” and the composer claiming, “I did think I did see all Heaven before me and the great God Himself.” Supposedly Handel often left his meals untouched during this compositional period, in an apparent display of devotional fasting and monastic self-denial. Present-day historians more familiar with Handel’s life and religious views tend to downplay these stories. It’s been suggested that if Handel did indeed have visions of Heaven while he composed Messiah, then it was only in the same manner in which he visualized the Roman pantheon of gods while he composed his opera Semele. Handel’s religious faith was sincere, but tended to be practical rather than mystical.

Following the pattern of Italian baroque opera, Messiah is divided into three parts. The first (presented in this concert tonight) is concerned with prophecies of the Messiah’s coming, drawing heavily from messianic texts in the Book of Isaiah, and concludes with an account of the Christmas story that mixes both Old and New Testament sources. The second part deals with Christ’s mission and sacrifice, culminating in the grand “Hallelujah Chorus.” The final, shortest section is an extended hymn of thanksgiving, an expression of faith beginning with Job’s statement “I know that my Redeemer liveth” and closing with the majestic chorus “Worthy is the Lamb” and a fugal “Amen.”

In its focus on Christ’s sacrifice, Messiah resembles the great Lutheran Passions of Schütz and Bach, but with much less direct narrative and more meditative commentary on the redemptive nature of the Messiah’s earthly mission. Handel scholar Robert Myers suggested that “logically Handel’s masterpiece should be called Redemption, for its author celebrates the idea of Redemption, rather than the personality of Christ.” For the believer and non-believer alike, Handel’s Messiah is undoubtedly a majestic musical edifice.

But while a truly popular favorite around the world, Messiah aspires to more than just a reputation as an enjoyable musical event. After an early performance of the work in London, Lord Kinnoul congratulated Handel on the “noble entertainment!” he had recently brought to the city. Handel is said to have replied, “My Lord, I should be sorry if I only entertained them; I wished to make them better.” Certainly Messiah carries an ennobling message to people of all faiths and credos, proclaiming “peace on earth, and goodwill towards men”— a message that continues to be timely and universal.

(Program Notes by Luke Howard, 2009)
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<td>Sinfony</td>
<td>OVERTURE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accompagnato</td>
<td>COMFORT YE MY PEOPLE</td>
<td>Henry Heydinger, tenor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Air</td>
<td>EVERY VALLEY SHALL BE EXALTED</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chorus</td>
<td>AND THE GLORY OF THE LORD</td>
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<td>Accompagnato</td>
<td>THUS SAITH THE LORD</td>
<td>Nick Pierle, bass</td>
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<td>Air</td>
<td>BUT WHO MAY ABIDE THE DAY OF HIS COMING</td>
<td>Tabitha Brandel, alto</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chorus</td>
<td>AND HE SHALL PURIFY THE SONS OF LEVI</td>
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<td>Recitative</td>
<td>BEHOLD, A VIRGIN SHALL CONCEIVE</td>
<td>Xzavea Wommack-Johnson, alto</td>
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<td>Air &amp; Chorus</td>
<td>O THOU THAT TELLEST GOOD TIDINGS TO ZION</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accompagnato</td>
<td>FOR BEHOLD, DARKNESS SHALL COVER THE EARTH</td>
<td>Nick Pierle, bass</td>
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<td>Air</td>
<td>THE PEOPLE THAT WALKED IN DARKNESS</td>
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<td>Chorus</td>
<td>FOR UNTO US A CHILD IS BORN</td>
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<td>Pifa</td>
<td>SINFONIA PASTORALE</td>
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<td>Recitative</td>
<td>THERE WERE SHEPHERDS ABIDING IN THE FIELD</td>
<td>Reyna Alston, soprano</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accompagnato</td>
<td>AND LO, THE ANGEL OF THE LORD CAME UPON THEM</td>
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<td>Recitative</td>
<td>AND THE ANGEL SAID UNTO THEM</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accompagnato</td>
<td>AND SUDDENLY THERE WAS WITH THE ANGEL</td>
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<td>Chorus</td>
<td>GLORY TO GOD</td>
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<tr>
<td>Air</td>
<td>REJOICE GREATLY, O DAUGHTER OF ZION</td>
<td>Stephanie Stone, soprano</td>
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<td>Recitative</td>
<td>THEN SHALL THE EYES OF THE BLIND</td>
<td>Tabitha Brandel, alto</td>
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<tr>
<td>Air</td>
<td>HE SHALL FEED HIS FLOCK</td>
<td>Tabitha Brandel, alto</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chorus</td>
<td>HIS YOKE IS EASY, AND HIS BURTHEN IS LIGHT</td>
<td>Reyna Alston, soprano</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chorus</td>
<td>Hallelujah Chorus</td>
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COMBINED HIGH POINT UNIVERSITY CHOIRS

Jesse Allion
Reyna Alston
Sabine Blatner
Tabitha Brandel
Melody Bright
Kiara Busby
Shannon Conrad
Jarett Cornbrooks
Kenzi Davey
Chelsea DeLapp
Abby Ferland
Tiara Fielding
Cassie Fischer
April Gessouroun
Jack Gilsenan
Felecia Gonzalez
Amanda Grubb
Henry Heydinger
Jerry Hurley
Brett Hutchinson
Emily Janik
Jacob Janik
Oli Jefferson
Libby Johnson
Rae Johnson
Julianne Kendrick
Hannah Kennedy
Brynn Lau
Gracie LeFever
Kema Leonard
John Liebkemann
Kristina Lincoln
Emma Longboat
Alyson Longe
Madi Lovell
Emma Lynch
Faye Lynch
Joseph Maronski
Logan Mayo
Gabriela Metaras
Juan Montoya
Amanda Moss
Bridget Mulder
Divine Murtala
Tess Nguyen
Natasha Pasui
Amanda Pennucci
Carmela Petruccelli
Laura Piccione
Hannah Pickett
Sydney Prewett
Ashleigh Purvis
Fritz Rolle
Erika Rooney
James Sandoval
Justin Shaw
Caroline Silver
Elijah Sprung
Josef Stokes
Steph Stone
Hailey Strauss
Caroline Sykes
Alex Tzetzo
Justus Ulman
Katherine VanDerStad
Mackenzie Warden
Sydney Wargo
Levi Wengen
Myra Williams
Jessica Wilson
Xzavea Wommack-Johnson
Carly Zimmerman

CONCERT MASTER
Matt Keifer (faculty)

1ST VIOLIN
Ewa Dharamraj (principal)
Marjorie Sharpe
Laurence Brooks
Jorge Rodriguez

2ND VIOLIN
Gregorio Midero (principal)
Alex Olesya
Luci White
Heather Blake

VIOLA
Matthew Box (principal)
Christen Blanton
Louise Campbell

CELLO
Margaret Petty (principal, faculty)
Ryan Graebert

STRING BASS
Emery Weigh (principal)

TRUMPET
Russell Smith (faculty)
Rob Elliot

TIMPANI
Steve McHugh (faculty)

CONTINUO
PG Hazard (faculty)

BASSOON
Mark Hekman (faculty)

High Point University
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