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2015-2016 – A Celebration of the Montgomery Philharmonic’s 10th Anniversary Season

Concert 2 – December 13, 2015 With the Central Maryland Choral

Debussy | Poulenc | Handel

About George Frideric Händel –

It is interesting to note that Händel was born the same year as Johann Sebastian Bach and Domenico Scarlatti—two giants of the Baroque period.

Händel’s early years were spent in conflict with his father—a well-known barber-surgeon who served the courts of Saxe-Weissenfels and the Margrave of Brandenburg. On a trip with his father to Weissenfels to visit his half-brother, Händel played a surprise concert for Duke Johann Adolph. He surprised everyone, and the duke convinced Händel’s father that he should study organ.

At 17, in accordance with his father’s wishes, Händel began to study law at the University of Halle. During this time, in the background, he continued to polish his skills as a musician on the organ, harpsichord, and violin. While still in law school, he accepted a post at the former cathedral in Halle. Händel then went on to accept a position as violinist and harpsichordist of the Hamburg Oper am Gänsemarkt. It was at the opera where he met other composers and began to compose in earnest. He was just out of law school when he produced his first two operas—*Almira* and *Nero*.

In 1706, Händel traveled to Italy at the invitation of Ferdinando de’ Medici. While there, he composed operas in Florence and an oratorio in Rome. In 1710, he moved back to Germany, becoming the Kapellmeister to the court of Prince George in Hannover. Prince George would later become King George I of Great Britain and Ireland in 1714. In 1712, Händel moved to England, where his patrons were Queen Anne, Lord Burlington, and King George I. He wrote *Water Music* for King George as a reconciliation between himself and the King.

Born: February 23, 1685, Halle, Germany

Died: April 14, 1759, London, United Kingdom

Full name: Georg Friedrich Händel

Burials: Westminster Abby, London, United Kingdom

Parents: Georg Händel, Dorothea Händel

Compositions: 42 operas, 29 oratorios, more than 120 cantatas, trios, and duets, 16 organ concerti.

Messiah (1741) (Part 1) – Georg Frideric Händel (1685–1759)

Händel composed the *Messiah* using the text compiled by Charles Jennens from the King James Bible and the Book of Psalms included in the *Book of Common Prayer*. Händel had been living in England for almost 30 years and had established himself as a composer of Italian opera with the highly successful operas *Rinaldo*, *Julius Caesar*, *Orlando*, and *Agrippina*. The musical world was changing in the 1730s, so Händel followed suit by writing English oratorio. In 1736, he composed *Alexander’s Feast*, followed by *Saul* and *Israel in Egypt* in 1739. *Messiah* came along in 1741 at the request of the 3rd Duke of Devonshire.

In the winter of 1741–1742, Händel was invited to Dublin to give a series of concerts to benefit the hospitals there. The premiere was performed on April 13, 1742 at the New Music Hall on Fishamble Street with a choir of 26 boys and 5 men from the combined choirs of St. Patrick’s and Christ Church cathedrals.

Part 1 is often called the Christmas portion of the *Messiah*. The story begins with the prophecy of the Messiah and his virgin birth. His birth is announced by words from Isaiah and followed by the proclamation to the shepherds. The piece then reflects on the Messiah’s deeds. Interestingly, the piece does not contain names of characters. It is thought that Händel did this because he wanted to avoid charges of blasphemy. Instead, he wrote music that tells the story through meditation and implication.

Part 1 corresponds to Advent, Christmas, and the life of Jesus, while part 2 relates to Lent, Easter, the Ascension, and Pentecost. Part 3 ends the church year and addresses the end of time.

Musically, Händel uses the two purely instrumental movements—the overture (Sinfony) and the Pifa (pastorale introducing the shepherds in Bethlehem). The rest of the music includes soloists in recitatives and arias, with a few secco recitatives accompanied only by the continuo, and then choruses. The arias are usually in da capo form, although not in its strictest sense; Händel often formats them freely to convey the text. The choruses use all four voice parts—soprano, alto, tenor, and bass—with the occasional combination of soloist, chorus, and orchestra.

Part 1 is divided into 5 scenes. Following the Sinfony, the three movements of scene 1 consider salvation, while scene 2 uses three movements to speak about the apparition of God. Scene 3 has a short introduction and then addresses Isaiah’s prophecy about the virgin birth of the Messiah. Scene 4 is the only dramatic scene of the oratorio; it describes the annunciation to the shepherds and is taken from the Gospel of Luke (Luke 2:14). It sets the stage for the scene with the instrumental Pifa. Part 1 closes with scene 5, which describes the deeds of the Messiah and the response of man.

Text:

Instrumentation – 2 oboes, 2 bassoons, 2 trumpets, timpani, strings, basso continuo

Artifacts –

[Leonard Bernstein’s full score](#)

[A second score used by Leonard Bernstein](#)


1. Handel: Messiah - London Symphony Orchestra & Sir Colin Davis
2. Handel: Messiah - Academy of St. Martin in the Fields, Academy of St. Martin in the Fields Chorus, Anne Sofie von Otter, Jerry Hadley, Michael Chance, Robert Lloyd, Sir Neville Marriner & Sylvia McNair
3. Handel: Messiah - Chicago Symphony Chorus, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Dame Kiri Te Kanawa & Sir Georg Solti
4. Handel: Messiah - English Baroque Soloists, John Eliot Gardiner & Monteverdi Choir


1. Handel: Messiah (250th Anniversary Performance)
2. Handel's Messiah
3. The Messiah: An Oratorio for Four-Part Chorus of Mixed Voices, Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass Soli and Piano
4. Handel - Messiah / Vyvyan · Sinclair · Vickers · Tozzi · Royal PO · Beecham
5. Handel: The Man & His Music
6. Handel (Master Musicians Series)

YouTube Video Links –

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZTZRtRFkvyk>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=71NCzuDNUcg>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3w_EmCYrCIE