

# Nantwich Choral Society



## HANDEL MESSIAH



SATURDAY 5th DECEMBER  
- 1992 -

The Parish Church of St. Mary, Nantwich  
at 7.00 p.m.

### NANTWICH CHORAL SOCIETY

NANTWICH SINFONIA  
Leader: Claire Rapin

Jane Deakin, soprano

Stephen Carter, counter-tenor

Paul Phoenix, tenor

Philip Ravenscroft, bass

Joy Roberts, harpsichord

conducted by  
Stephen Buckman



### — PROGRAMME —

#### MESSIAH

G. F. Handel (1685 - 1759)

##### Sinfonia

Comfort ye my people  
Every valley shall be exalted  
And the glory of the Lord  
Thus saith the Lord  
But who may abide  
And he shall purify  
Behold, a virgin shall conceive  
O thou that tellest  
For behold, darkness shall cover the earth  
For unto us a child is born  
Pifa  
There were shepherds  
And lo, the angel of the lord  
And the angel said unto them  
And suddenly there was with the angel  
Glory to God  
Rejoice greatly  
Then shall the eyes of the blind  
He shall feed his flock  
His yoke is easy

(tenor)  
(tenor)  
(chorus)  
(bass)  
(alto)  
(chorus)  
(alto)  
(alto)  
(alto)  
(bass)  
(chorus)  
(soprano)  
(soprano)  
(soprano)  
(soprano)  
(chorus)  
(soprano)  
(alto)  
(alto and soprano)  
(chorus)

### — INTERVAL —

Behold the Lamb of God  
He was despised  
Surely He hath borne our griefs  
And with His stripes  
All we like sheep  
All they that see Him  
He trusted in God  
Thy rebuke has broken His heart  
Behold, and see if there be any sorrow  
He was cut off  
But thou didst not leave His soul in hell  
Lift up your heads  
Unto which of the angels  
Let all the angels of God  
Thou art gone up on high  
The Lord gave the word  
How beautiful are the feet  
Their sound is gone out  
Why do the nations

(chorus)  
(alto)  
(chorus)  
(chorus)  
(chorus)  
(tenor)  
(chorus)  
(tenor)  
(tenor)  
(tenor)  
(tenor)  
(chorus)  
(tenor)  
(chorus)  
(soprano)  
(chorus)  
(soprano)  
(chorus)  
(bass)

Let us break their bonds asunder  
He that dwelleth in heaven  
Thou shalt break them  
Hallelujah

(chorus)  
(tenor)  
(tenor)  
(chorus)

I know that my redeemer liveth  
Since by man came death  
Behold I tell you a mystery  
The trumpet shall sound  
Then shall be brought to pass  
O death, where is thy sting  
But thanks be to God  
If God be for us  
Worthy is the Lamb

(soprano)  
(chorus)  
(bass)  
(bass)  
(alto)  
(alto and tenor)  
(chorus)  
(soprano)  
(chorus)

Public reaction to the first London performance of *Messiah*, at Convent Garden on 23rd March 1743, was, to say the least, muted. The year before, when it was premiered in Dublin, the response had been quite different: *Faulkner's Dublin Journal* declared that "Words are wanting to express the exquisite Delight it afforded to the admiring crowded Audience. The Sublime, the Grand, and the Tender, adapted to the most elevated, majestic and moving Words, conspired to transport and charm the ravished Heart and Ear". The Covent Garden performance, on the other hand, went unremarked in the London papers.

It's true that *Messiah* is far from being Handel's most colourful oratorio, and must have come as rather a disappointment to those first London audiences, but it was the subject matter that was the real reason for the work's initial unpopularity. A new wave of puritanism was hitting the country and there was opposition to the fact that oratorios were performed in playhouses and taverns (dens of iniquity) by musicians (doubtless immoral) from the opera. Previously all Handel's English oratorios had been based on Old Testament stories, but with this one he was treading on such thin ice that he felt obliged to avoid the title "*Messiah*" advertising it instead as "*A New Sacred Oratorio*".

So, how did *Messiah* rise from such an unpromising start to the position of pre-eminence that it has held for the last 150 years? Quite simply (and probably fortuitously) Handel took it out of the theatre and into the church: every spring from 1750 until his death nine years later he gave a charity performance of *Messiah* in the chapel of the Foundling Hospital in order to raise funds for the orphans there. This association with charitable causes (which still remains) also gave *Messiah* an added aura of "worthiness" which the Victorians exploited, turning concerts into ponderous religious rituals and culminating in the series of increasingly gargantuan performances at the Crystal Palace. Thankfully those days are long gone now and *Messiah* has been relieved of most of its post-Handelian accretions, so that once again we can enjoy Handel's masterpiece in the spirit it was intended.

Colin Bromelow