

Nantwich Choral Society

21st Anniversary Season



HANDEL MESSIAH



SATURDAY 4th DECEMBER
- 1993 -

The Parish Church of St. Mary Nantwich
at 7.00pm.

NANTWICH CHORAL SOCIETY

NANTWICH SINFONIA
(Leader: David Routledge)

Jane Deakin, *soprano*

Stephen Carter, *alto*

Robin Green, *tenor*

Philip Ravenscroft, *bass*

Joy Roberts, *harpsichord*

Conducted by
Stephen Buckman



- PROGRAMME -

MESSIAH

G F Handel (1685 - 1759)

PART THE FIRST

- Sinfonia
- I Comfort ye my people
Every valley shall be exalted
And the glory of the Lord
(tenor)
- II Thus saith the Lord
But who may abide
And he shall purify
(tenor)
- III Behold, a virgin shall conceive
O thou that tellest
For behold darkness shall cover the earth
(chorus)
- IV Pifa
There were shepherds abiding in the field
And lo, the angel of the Lord
(bass)
- V Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion
Then shall the eyes of the blind
He shall feed his flock
(alto)
- His yolk is easy
(chorus)

- INTERVAL -

PART THE SECOND

- I Behold the Lamb of God
He was despised
Surely he hath borne our griefs
(chorus)
- II He was cut off out of the land of the living
But thou didst not leave his soul in hell
(alto)
- III Lift up your heads, O ye gates
Unto which of the angels said he at any time
(chorus)
- IV Let all the angels of God worship him
(chorus)
- V Thou art gone up on high
The Lord gave the word
How beautiful are the feet
(bass)
- VI Why do the nations so furiously rage together
Let us break their bonds asunder
(chorus)
- VII He that dwelleth in heaven
Thou shalt break them
(tenor)
- Hallelujah
(chorus)

PART THE THIRD

- I I know that my redeemer liveth
Since by man came death
(soprano)
- (chorus)

- II Behold, I tell you a mystery
The trumpet shall sound
(bass)
- III Then shall be brought to pass
O death, where is thy sting?
But thanks be to God
(alto)
- IV Worthy is the Lamb that was slain
Amen
(soprano)
- (chorus)

Although we most often hear **MESSIAH** nowadays around Christmas, when it was first written it was always heard just before Easter, during Lent, when performances of opera were forbidden but dramatic stories from the Bible could be performed, *unstaged*, as oratorios.

Charles Jennens compiled the text for **MESSIAH** by putting together carefully selected passages from both the Old and New Testaments, but the fact that he called the work simply **MESSIAH** and not **THE MESSIAH** indicates that his aim was not to give a straight forward account of Christ's birth, life, death and resurrection, as his audience was probably expecting, but by referring to those events to present them with something more abstract and thought-provoking. He prefaced his libretto with two quotations, or "mottoes" as he called them. The first is in Latin and means 'Let us sing of greater things', whilst the second is taken from St Paul and makes it clear that the real subject of **MESSIAH** is nothing less than 'The Mystery of Godliness'.

To make it easier for the audience to follow the argument of the oratorio in the absence of a dramatic plot, Jennens divided the three parts into smaller sections which he numbered like operatic scenes. The subject of these 'scenes' as printed in the word-books for the first London performances in 1743 (and re-printed in the list of movements above) are as follows:-

PART THE FIRST

- I Isaiah's prophecy of salvation: the Gospel or 'good news'.
II The judgement that will accompany the appearance of the Saviour.
III The specific prophecy of Christ's birth.
IV The Incarnation, announced to the shepherds near Bethlehem.
V The redemption and healing brought by the Saviour.

PART THE SECOND

- I Christ's passion, scourging and crucifixion.
II Christ's death and resurrection.
III Christ's ascension.
IV Christ's reception in Heaven.
V Whitsun, and the subsequent preaching of the Gospel.
VI The world's hostile reception to the Gospel.
VII God's ultimate victory.

PART THE THIRD

- I The promise of eternal life and the triumph over Original Sin, through Christ's victory.
II The general resurrection that will accompany the Day of Judgement.
III The final conquest over sin.
IV Acclamation of the Messiah

Handel's music for **MESSIAH** complements perfectly the nature of Jennens' libretto. It is far removed from the flamboyant world of the opera house and is the most austere of all Handel's oratorios. Despite Jennens' own expectation that the work would be 'a fine entertainment', Handel made few concessions to the tastes of his London audience with the result that **MESSIAH** was not at first well received. Within a few years, however, the moral and social climate began to change and **MESSIAH** became Handel's most popular oratorio and, after his death in 1759, his monument.