

■ *Nantwich Choral Society* ■

HANDEL MESSIAH



SATURDAY 3rd DECEMBER 1994

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

NANTWICH CHORAL SOCIETY

NANTWICH SINFONIA
(Leader: Tony Cucchiara)

Catrin Ley, *soprano*

Stephen Carter, *alto*

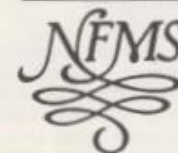
Paul Phoenix, *tenor*

Philip Ravenscroft, *bass*

Joy Roberts, *harpsichord*

Conducted by
Stephen Buckman

NATIONAL FEDERATION
OF MUSIC SOCIETIES



- PROGRAMME -

MESSIAH

G F Handel (1685 - 1759)

PART THE FIRST

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

- INTERVAL -

PART THE SECOND

- I Behold the Lamb of God (chorus)
He was despised (alto)
Surely he hath borne our griefs (chorus)
And with his stripes we are healed (chorus)
All we like sheep have gone astray (chorus)
All they that see him laugh him to scorn (tenor)
He trusted in God (chorus)
Thy rebuke hath broken his heart (tenor)
Behold, and see if there be any sorrow (tenor)
- II He was cut off out of the land of the living (soprano)
But thou didst not leave his soul in hell (soprano)
- III Lift up your heads, O ye gates (chorus)
- IV Unto which of the angels said he at any time (chorus)
Let all the angels of God worship him (tenor)
- V Thou art gone up on high (alto)
The Lord gave the word (chorus)
How beautiful are the feet (soprano)
Their sound is gone out (chorus)
- VI Why do the nations so furiously rage together (bass)
Let us break their bonds asunder (chorus)
- VII He that dwelleth in heaven (tenor)
Thou shalt break them (chorus)
Hallelujah

PART THE THIRD

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

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

Colin Bromelow