

■ *Nantwich Choral Society* ■

HANDEL MESSIAH



SATURDAY 6th DECEMBER 1997

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

This performance
is dedicated to the memory
of
CHRISTINE BUCKMAN

~
27th January 1960
to
19th September 1997
~

*The trumpet shall sound,
and the dead shall be raised incorruptible.*

 Nantwich Choral Society

NANTWICH SINFONIA
(Leader: Joanne Quigley)

Fiona Motherway, *soprano*

Marjorie Seddon, *contralto*

James Gilchrist, *tenor*

Philip Ravenscroft, *bass*

Joy Roberts, *harpsichord*

Conducted by
Stephen Buckman



~ PROGRAMME ~

MESSIAH - George Frideric 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 the day of his coming?	(contralto)
	And he shall purify	(chorus)
III	Behold, a virgin shall conceive	(contralto)
	O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion	(contralto & chorus)
	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 came upon them	(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	(contralto)
	He shall feed his flock	(contralto & soprano)
	His yoke is easy, and his burthen is light	(chorus)

~ INTERVAL ~

PART THE SECOND

I	Behold the Lamb of God	(chorus)
	He was despised	(contralto)
	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	(tenor)
	But thou didst not leave his soul in hell	(tenor)
III	Lift up your heads, O ye gates	(chorus)
IV	Unto which of the angels said he at any time	(tenor)
	Let all the angels of God worship him	(chorus)
V	Thou art gone up on high	(contralto)
	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	(tenor)
	Hallelujah	(chorus)

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	(contralto)
	O death, where is thy sting?	(contralto & tenor)
	But thanks be to God	(chorus)
	If God be for us	(soprano)
IV	Worthy is the Lamb that was slain	(chorus)

Handel's **MESSIAH** is surely the best-known and most highly regarded work in the entire English choral repertoire. As so often happens when examining works of great artistic merit, one does not have to delve deeply into its history to find an interesting catalogue of stories surrounding its creation and early performances.

George Frideric Handel (the composer's preferred version of his own name) was, both by training and by inclination, a composer of music for the theatre. The catholic nature of his genius was disguised by the great popularity of a handful of oratorios. Indeed, he was considered very much to be a 'church' composer; a view which paid scant heed to the majority of his output. It was the nature of the genre that led those who were so affected by the power of Handel's oratorio writing to pigeonhole him in this erroneous way.

Oratorio was an extended musical setting of a sacred text. The musical forms and styles embraced by this loose definition were readily identifiable with those of opera. Both genres contained material that was dramatic, narrative and contemplative. The principle differences between oratorio and opera were the lack of theatrical trappings and a greater emphasis upon the role of the chorus.

The 'English oratorio', as a readily identifiable and distinct musical entity, was of Handel's own devising. He created a musical entertainment, in three acts, which was a synthesis of elements from the English masque and anthem, French classical drama, Italian 'opera seria' and 'oratorio volgare' and the German Protestant oratorio. Handel's oratorios were written for performance in the theatre or the concert hall; concertos were often performed between acts. Even this very loose recipe makes it clear that **MESSIAH** was far from being a typical Handelian oratorio.

Handel's writing of **MESSIAH** in just 23 days is common knowledge; as is the composer's intention that performances of the work should benefit Dublin charities. Most audiences are also aware of the nature of the libretto which the English author, librettist and great friend of Handel, Charles Jennens, compiled from selected texts from the Bible. It was this purely biblical, and non-dramatic, text which distanced **MESSIAH** from those oratorios which might be considered as typical of the school of 'English oratorio' writing.

Jennens was much admired by Handel. However, the librettist repeatedly criticised the composer's contribution to their most famous collaboration. Jennens fancied that Handel would spend at least a year on the task of setting his text to music; Handel's twenty-three days seemed almost disrespectful to the author's efforts.

The first performance of **MESSIAH** was in Dublin; Handel travelled there via Chester. Whilst resting in Chester he directed the first run through of some of the choruses - having organised rehearsals using local singers. The first public rehearsal took place in Dublin on 9th April 1742. This was followed by the first performance on 13th April 1742. The first London performance of **MESSIAH** was at Covent Garden, on 23rd March 1743. Not only had Jennens been less than satisfied with what was to become Handel's most famous work, but it was actually condemned as blasphemous - it was considered by the more puritanical members of the audience that this 'Act of Religion' was unsuited to performance in a playhouse.

Whether viewed as an 'oratorio' or as an 'act of blasphemy', **MESSIAH** is undoubtedly a masterpiece from the pen of a great composer. Its refusal to comply with the rules laid down by the composer himself merely reinforces the power of its originality, an originality that has been imitated but never equalled.

Stephen Buckman

FIONA MOTHERWAY (soprano) comes from Western Australia. In 1994 she completed her studies at the Royal Academy of Music, London, graduating with the Dip.R.A.M. for Opera. At the R.A.M. she performed the roles of the Governess, 'Turn of the Screw' (Britten), Countess Lisa, 'Das Land des Lachelns' (Lehar), 'Semele' (Handel), and Fiordiligi, 'Cosi fan tutte' (Mozart) a role she has subsequently performed with other opera companies, including British Youth Opera. With the R.A.M. orchestra she was the soprano soloist in Mahler's 4th Symphony conducted by Sir Colin Davis.

An experienced operatic performer, her repertoire includes the Countess and Susanna 'Le Nozze di Figaro', Musetta 'La Boheme', Pamina 'Die Zauberflote', Gilda 'Rigoletto' and Olympia 'Les Contes d'Hoffmann'. Fiona has a particular interest in the operas of Handel and has performed the roles of Melissa 'Amadigi di Gaula', Atalanta 'Xerxes' and the title role of 'Semele'.

Fiona has given recitals at major London venues including Handel arias and duets at St John's, Smith Square and a French song recital at St Martin's in the Field. Her oratorio work includes Messiah (Handel), Creation, Nelson and Harmony Masses (Haydn), Requiem, C Minor, Coronation and Credo Masses (Mozart), Magnificat and Requiem (Rutter) and the Bach B Minor Mass.

JAMES GILCHRIST (tenor) began working as a full-time singer a year ago. Until then he had been working as a hospital doctor. He currently studies with Janice Chapman.

James is much in demand as a consort singer, and increasingly as a soloist. His ensemble singing has mostly been with specialist early music groups such as The Sixteen, the Tallis Scholars, Gabrieli Consort, Cardinal's Musick and Clerk's Group. He has appeared with Polyphony and the Monteverdi Choir.

As a concert soloist, James has received critical acclaim for his many performances as Evangelist in Bach's passions. He will appear as Evangelist in Bach's Christmas Oratorio in St John's, Smith Square in December. He recently performed Britten's Serenade in the St Endellion Festival, and will sing Britten's St Nicholas with Westminster Abbey Choir and the English Chamber Orchestra in the Barbican later this year. He has recently recorded songs by Grainger with the Royal Northern College of Music.

James took part in a production of *Acis and Galatea* with Leicester University earlier this year, and recently appeared in concert performances of two Schubert operas with 'I Fagiolini' (which toured Norway). In October he took the role of Ferrando in Oxford University's production of *Così fan Tutte*. In the same month he appeared as Peter Simple in Vaughan Williams's opera *Sir John in Love*, in a broadcast concert performance at the Barbican, under Richard Hickox.

MARJORIE SEDDON (contralto) was born in Prestbury and now lives in Betley, North Staffordshire. She trained as a biology teacher in Birmingham, and it was then that she started singing lessons with Norma Coddie. She has since studied with Ellis Keeler and Jane Ginsborg. Marjorie made her debut as Carmen in a staged production of Bizet's opera. She has built a tremendous reputation as soloist with her warm, beautiful voice and sensitive artistry.

Marjorie specialises in oratorio and recital work, having a strong interest in English song of all periods.

Previous engagements include singing Clod of Clay in the opera 'Lamentations of Thel' by Dmitri Smirnov, Didymus in Handel's 'Theodora', Dido in Purcell's 'Dido and Aeneas' and Brahms's 'Alto Rhapsody'. Oratorio performances include Haydn masses, Dvorak's 'Stabat Mater' and 'Mass in D', Bach's 'Mass in B minor' and 'St Matthew Passion', and Handel's 'Judas Maccabeus' and 'Messiah'.

Future engagements include concerts with Halton Orpheus Choir and Keele Bach Choir.

PHILIP RAVENSCROFT (bass) is an artist who can happily boast of a genuine Bass-baritone voice. His wide vocal range enables him to sing many works from the baritone as well as the usual bass repertoire.

Born in the Midlands, the early part of his career was spent travelling the world in the Merchant Navy but he eventually gave this up to pursue a career in music.

He was trained by Gordon Clinton at the Birmingham School of Music and in a very short time had won the Singer of the Year Award at the Llangollen International Eisteddfod. In the nationwide competition for the Cinzano Opera Prize, he sang in the finals at Covent Garden.

Since then, Philip Ravenscroft has quickly established himself as one of the leading Bass-baritones in the country, working with many of the major choral societies, as well as the leading symphony orchestras.

His repertoire includes all the standard works as well as less frequently performed pieces, and he is particularly noted for his performances in works by Handel, Medelssohn's 'Elijah' and Verdi's Requiem. He also performs several roles from the operatic repertoire.

STEPHEN BUCKMAN (conductor) is an organist, harpsichordist, conductor and composer. He has performed in France, Germany, Austria and America, as well as throughout the United Kingdom. His career has included several spells as a Musical Director in London's West End. He has also worked in the musical theatre in New York.

Stephen's particular interest lies in working with singers. A pupil of the late Sir Adrian Boult, he directed his first choir at the age of fifteen, and has trained and composed for choirs ever since. He is an experienced voice coach, having trained many actors who now regularly perform on stage and screen.

Stephen Buckman has been Conductor of Nantwich Choral Society for fifteen years, a post from which he will stand down at the end of this month in order that he might devote more time to academic research into the philosophy of music.