

Nantwich Choral Society

Israel in Egypt

George Frideric Handel



Janet Ollier and Suzanne Winter, sopranos

Susan Marrs, contralto

Stephen Newlove, tenor

James Hall and Mathieu Potot, baritones

The 18th Century Sinfonia

John Naylor, conductor

St Mary's Church, Nantwich

Saturday 11 November 2013, 7.30 pm

Welcome!

As chairman of the Nantwich Choral Society, it is with very great pleasure that I welcome you all most warmly to this evening's performance of Handel's *Israel in Egypt*.

As one of the leading amateur choirs of the North West the Nantwich Choral Society celebrated its 40th Anniversary last year. We continue to flourish, having started as an educational local authority evening class in 1972; we are now a distinguished choral society with 100+ mixed choral voices. Under the inspirational guiding baton of our highly respected Music Director, John Naylor, and our accomplished accompanist Simon Russell, we strive to keep the choral tradition alive by singing great choral works and by having a varied and expanding repertoire of music, some familiar and some less so. We enjoy a fine choral reputation and excellent critiques of our performances in Nantwich and the wider Cheshire area.

Last season we performed two iconic pieces of choral work, Handel's *Messiah* in St Mary's Church, Nantwich, and J S Bach's *St Matthew Passion* in Chester Cathedral, without doubt one of the greatest pieces of choral music ever written.

The dramatic impact of Handel's oratorio *Israel in Egypt* is second only to that of his *Messiah* and it has rightly been a long standing favourite within the choral repertoire. It is entirely fitting that this great work should be the first major concert of our 41st season.

To follow it, we have another varied season of concerts. Our annual Family Carol Concert in December will be followed in January by a 'Come and Sing' performance of Brahms *Requiem*. In March we look forward to a Sunday afternoon concert which will include *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast* by Coleridge Taylor and Elgar's *Enigma Variations*, and our Summer Concert will include music by contemporary choral composers.

The resources required to stage these performances are considerable. We wish to acknowledge the receipt of legacies, sponsorships, grants and donations which help us to maintain and develop our musical standards, for without such generosity it would not be possible for our choral society to have the opportunity of taking part in, or for our audience to listen to, these wonderful choral works.

Elizabeth Lea

Acknowledgements

Nantwich Choral Society gratefully acknowledges help and support during the recent past from The Arts Council, the Harding Trust, Cheshire East Council, Nantwich Town Council, and the advertisers in our programmes.

ISRAEL IN EGYPT

A Sacred Oratorio

Composed by Georg Frideric Handel,
words attributed to Charles Jennens

PART I

TENOR RECITATIVE

Now there arose a new king over Egypt,
which knew not Joseph; and he set over
Israel taskmasters to afflict them with
burthens, and they made them serve
with rigour.

Exodus i, 8, 11, 13.

CHORUS

And the children of Israel sighed by
reason of the bondage, and their cry
came up unto God. They oppressed
them with burthens, and made them
serve with rigour; and their cry came up
unto God.

Exodus ii. 23.

TENOR RECITATIVE

Then sent He Moses, His servant, and
Aaron whom He had chosen; these
shewed His signs among them, and
wonders in the land of Ham.
He turned their waters into blood.

Psalm cv. 26, 27, 29.

CHORUS

They loathed to drink of the river. He
turned their waters into blood.

Exodus vii. 18, 19.

MEZZO – SOPRANO AIR

Their land brought forth frogs, yea even
in their king's chambers.

Psalm cv. 30.

He gave their cattle over to the
pestilence; blotches and blains broke
forth on man and beast.

Exodus xi. 9, 10.

CHORUS

He spake the word, and there came all
manner of flies and lice in all their
quarters. He spake; and the locusts
came without number, and devoured
the fruits of the ground.

Psalm cv. 31, 34, 35.

CHORUS

He gave them hailstones for rain; fire
mingled with the hail ran along upon the
ground.

Psalm cv. 32; Exodus ix. 23, 24.

CHORUS

He sent a thick darkness over the land,
even darkness which might be felt.

Exodus x. 21.

CHORUS

He smote all the first-born of Egypt, the
chief of all their strength.

Psalm cv. 36, 37.

CHORUS

But as for His people, He led them forth
like sheep; He brought them out with
silver and gold; there was not one feeble
person among their tribes.

Psalm lxxviii. 53; cv. 37.

CHORUS

Egypt was glad when they departed, for the fear of them fell upon them.

CHORUS

He rebuked the Red Sea, and it was dried up. He led them through the deep as through a wilderness.

Psalms cvi. 9.

But the waters overwhelmed their enemies, there was not one of them left.

Psalms cvi. 11.

CHORUS

And Israel saw that great work that the Lord did upon the Egyptians; and the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord and His servant Moses.

Exodus xiv. 31.

Interval of 20 Minutes

PART II

CHORUS

Moses and the children of Israel sung this song unto the Lord, and spake, saying: I will sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea.

Exodus xv. 1.

SOPRANO DUET

The Lord is my strength and my song; He is become my salvation.

Exodus xv. 2.

CHORUS

He is my God, and I will prepare Him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt Him.

Exodus xv. 2.

BASS DUET

The Lord is a man of war: Lord is his name. Pharaoh's chariots and his host hath He cast into the sea; his chosen captains also are drowned in the Red Sea.

Exodus xv. 3, 4

CHORUS

The depths have covered them: they sank into the bottom as a stone.

Exodus xv. 5.

CHORUS

Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power; Thy right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces the enemy.

Exodus xv. 6

CHORUS

And in the greatness of Thine excellency Thou hast overthrown them that rose up against Thee.

Exodus xv. 7

CHORUS

Thou sentest forth Thy wrath, which consumed them as stubble.

Exodus xv. 7.

CHORUS

And with the blast of Thy nostrils the waters were gathered together, the floods stood upright as an heap, and the depths were congealed in the heart of the sea.

Exodus xv. 8.

TENOR AIR

The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my lust shall be satisfied upon them; I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them.

Exodus xv. 9.

SOPRANO AIR

Thou didst blow with the wind, the sea covered them; they sank as lead in the mighty waters.

Exodus xv. 10.

CHORUS

Who is like unto Thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like Thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders? Thou stretchedst out Thy right hand, the earth swallowed them.

Exodus xv. 11, 12.

ALTO AND TENOR DUET

Thou in Thy mercy hast led forth Thy people which Thou hast redeemed; Thou hast guided them in Thy strength unto Thy holy habitation.

Exodus xv. 13.

CHORUS

The people shall hear, and be afraid: sorrow shall take hold on them: all the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away: by the greatness of Thy arm they shall be as still as a stone; till Thy people pass over, O Lord, which Thou hast purchased.

Exodus xv. 14, 15, 16.

MEZZO –SOPRANO AIR

Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of Thine inheritance, in the place, O Lord, which Thou hast made for Thee to dwell in, in the Sanctuary, O Lord, which Thy hands have established.

Exodus xv. 17.

CHORUS

The Lord shall reign for ever and ever.

Exodus xv. 18.

TENOR RECITATIVE

For the horse of Pharaoh went in with his chariots and with his horsemen into the sea, and the Lord brought again the waters of the sea upon them; but the children of Israel went on dry land in the midst of the sea.

Exodus xv. 19.

CHORUS

The Lord shall reign for ever and ever.

Exodus xv. 18.

TENOR RECITATIVE

And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam answered them:

Exodus xv. 20, 21.

MEZZO –SOPRANO AND CHORUS

Sing ye to the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea.

Exodus xv. 21, 18.

The Background History

Even today, the Middle East and specifically Egypt and Israel are never far away from the news headlines. Enmity spilling over into conflict is just as prevalent today as it was more than 3000 years ago when the Bible records the exile of the Jewish people in Egypt in the books of Exodus and others in the Old Testament. However, taking the numbers recorded in the Bible, it is difficult to accept that the Egyptian nation of some 3.5 million could have absorbed as slaves some 2 million people; as they left, they would have formed a column 150 miles long, marching 10 abreast without animals!

Whilst modern scholarship doubts the events of the Exodus and certainly its scale, its main dramatic events (especially Passover) form the bedrock of Jewish religious observance and are familiar to anyone acquainted with the Old Testament. Perhaps there were Jewish slaves in Egypt. Perhaps they took the blame for a series of epidemics and natural disasters which afflicted the Egyptians. And perhaps as a consequence they were hounded out of the country, just as they were expelled from many European countries in the second millennium AD. But there are no certainties in this ancient history.

Nevertheless it seems that the Hebrew tribes of Israel entered Egypt voluntarily as immigrants, probably about 1600 B.C., at the invitation of Joseph, the kidnapped son of Jacob who had become a high official in the Pharaonic administration (he of the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat). Under Egyptian rule, the Israelites initially prospered and their numbers multiplied over three centuries to perhaps as much as 40% of the Egyptian populace. However, after a change in the ethnic succession of the Pharaohs, the Hebrews were disenfranchised and enslaved.

Moses, Hebrew by birth, the adopted son of a Pharaonic queen (possibly Hatshepsut, queen to Thutmose II, or, alternatively, the daughter of Rameses II; the date of the Exodus is uncertain over a period of about two hundred years) as a young man was a loyal Egyptian subject and may have been a military leader. He fled Egypt – possibly at Hatshepsut's death, when her half-brother and arch-enemy, Thutmose III, assumed the throne – and spent 40 years in the wilderness.

He returned, reluctantly, aged 80, to lead the Hebrews out of Egypt, and confronted Pharaoh. Failed attempts at negotiation caused a backlash, and Moses initiated a series of ten plagues, targeting sacred aspects of Egyptian culture. The Nile itself, the sacred river, was first: Its waters turned to blood and became unpalatable. Then came frogs, lice, flies, locusts, cattle pestilence, boils, hail, a 'great darkness', and, the most crushing blow, the death of Egypt's first-born sons.

Pharaoh's magicians tried to demonstrate that these plagues were tricks – they succeeded in replicating the bloody river and invoking frogs – but the continuing curses broke Pharaoh's will, and in a moment of weakness he approved the departure. The Egyptians ceded "silver and gold" as a pay off to the Hebrews to ensure their exit. Pharaoh subsequently changed his mind and dispatched an army to overtake them, but

Moses' charges escaped across the Red Sea on sand laid bare by a strong east wind. The army and its chariots, attempting to follow, became bogged down in the sand and were wiped out when the waters returned. Modern explanations can be found for the plagues, and even for the sea crossing; however, the concurrence of these events, and Moses' foreknowledge of them, certainly rank as miracles, whatever the explanation.

The Composer

George Frideric Handel was born in 1685, at Halle, in the central part of what recently was East Germany. He was an almost exact contemporary of Johann Sebastian Bach. With the collapse of the Holy Roman Empire in 1648, Europe had dissolved into hundreds of princely states, divided between the Empire's Catholicism and Martin Luther's Protestant initiative. Both men grew up in fragmented, economically depressed and depopulated regions but incredibly, music flourished in this tumultuous environment.

Unlike Bach, who was born into a musical family, Handel became a musician against his parents' wishes. At the age of 17 he became a church organist, and at 18 he went to Hamburg to play the violin and harpsichord in the opera house. Opera fascinated him from the beginning, and within three years Hamburg was presenting his operas. The Italians were pre-eminent in opera, so he soon found the way to Italy, where he spent three years regularly churning out more operas and at least one oratorio. In 1710 he returned to Germany, but almost immediately left for England to produce an opera where after a brief return to Germany he lived until his death in 1759 with only brief visits to the Continent.

Like Bach, Handel was one of the pillars of the Late Baroque musical period. The Baroque musical style emerged about 1600, with composers such as Gabrieli and Monteverdi, and can be said to have ended at Handel's death. His output was prodigious: over 40 operas, two dozen oratorios, hundreds of anthems, cantatas, solos and songs; a hundred or more pieces of chamber and orchestral music, including the familiar *Water Music* and *Royal Fireworks Music*; and several books of keyboard works. He never married, and was a somewhat eccentric figure who apparently never lost his thick German accent. He enjoyed Queen Anne's patronage and subsequently that of King George 1st whose Kapellmeister he had been whilst the King was previously Elector of Hanover. He died as the much respected Grand Old Man of English music and was buried in Westminster Abbey. His musical legacy, in particular to the English oratorio, has remained constant.

The Oratorio

Handel's oratorio *Israel in Egypt* was written in 1738, three years before the better known *Messiah*. During Lent the ecclesiastical authorities would not allow stage productions of Biblical works, or indeed any stage productions; the concert-style oratorio presentation solved both problems at a time when the theatre would otherwise have remained closed.

Handel originally intended to use a previously composed anthem as the first movement of the Biblical drama that became *Israel in Egypt*. As presented here, however, this

oratorio consists of only the two parts that Handel composed in two weeks during October, 1738. The first part tells the story of the oppression and the escape. Much of the story comes from the Biblical account in Exodus, but Handel interspersed references to the story from Psalms instead of relying totally on one book. The second part is a song of praise and thanks for deliverance.

Like *Messiah*, *Israel in Egypt* is somewhat atypical of Handel oratorios. It contains even less solo material; also unusual is the extensive use of double choruses, with the themes alternately echoed and reinforced. The work nonetheless exhibits Handel's opera-honed dramatic sense, not only in choral climaxes but in orchestral textures which paint the scenery for the story.

For example, the hailstorm begins with a few small missiles, and rises to a roar as the chorus enters; the frogs hop through the king's chambers before being announced; and, as the chorus tells of the locusts without number, they can be heard buzzing furiously in the orchestra. And, in the second part of the oratorio, the exultant themes when Pharaoh's cavalry is routed convey the essence of songs of victory of every age and culture.

Part One

At the beginning, the tenor sings a short recitative setting the historical context of the work in the post-Joseph era in Egypt. There follows a poignant chorus which describes the problems which have overtaken the Israelites. Cast in the dark key of C minor, it opens with a brief solo statement by the alto, followed by the uplifting theme for "*And their cry came up unto God*" and another theme, treated fugally, for "*they oppressed them with burthens.*" The long, haunting chorus returns again and again to the word "*sighed,*" literally palpitating with the agony of the situation. At the end we hear a simultaneous statement in all eight voices of the lament rising heavenward.

The sharp diversion of the next recitative from major (at "*wonders in the land of Ham*") to minor, without cadence, heralds the amazing turn of events. A chromatic *colla parte* fugue "*They loathed to drink of the river*" in which the strings double the voices comes from one of Handel's *Six Fugues for Organ* of 1735.

The alto soloist rather seems to revel in "*Their land brought forth frogs*", as portrayed by hopping figures in the violins and basses, and there is a macabre ring to the alliterative "blotches and blains".

Clarion calls by the chorus of "*He spake the word,*" reiterated by the trombones, foretell the clouds of tiny insects portrayed by the buzzing strings. The theme is from a serenade by Alessandro Stradella from whom Handel borrowed extensively in this work. Oboes quietly double the voice parts. The locusts seem particularly aggressive, inasmuch as the continuo doubles its speed and the overall texture thickens considerably. The insects dance away, as though proud of their work. The chorus "*He gave them hailstones for rain; fire mingled with the hail ran along upon the ground*" follows immediately: what seems to start out as a mild shower suddenly turns into a fierce hailstorm, with rivulets of

fire along the ground. Shouts of "*Fire!*" (certain to evoke terror in Londoners of the time) are heard from within the thick, closely imitative choral textures. Trumpets and drums make their first appearance.

An accompanied recitative ("*He sent a thick darkness over the land*") for chorus wanders chromatically from the C major of the previous movement to the A minor of the next. After their homophonic beginning, the voice-parts, too, wander individually; the effect is one of gathering gloom and despair, as if the Egyptian populace have lost their morale completely.

Bold orchestral strokes portray the smiting down of the sons of Egypt, with a double fugue in the chorus. Sopranos and altos first state the two subjects; oboes and bassoons double the voices of the fugue. Handel here uses another of his *Six Fugues for Organ*. In contrast, the Israelites are led away from Egypt "*like sheep*" in a gentle pastorate to another theme of Stradella. There is an expansive fugal treatment of the 'pay off' with silver and gold and then a reprise of all three sections. Finally, the chorus confirms the robust good health of Moses' tribe; they certainly didn't slink away. There's no feebleness here!

But a hollow, sinister fugue ("*Egypt was glad when they departed*"), foreshadows the dark fate of the pharaohs' troops. This is a borrowing of a fifty-year-old canzona by Johann Caspar Kerll.

Then occurs the climax of the Exodus, as the children of Israel pass unhindered through the Red Sea. The Lord rebukes the waters, *forte*, and they dry up, *piano*. A forthright march commences the procession, to which music is added in a rapid, cascading countermelody. The fugue subject is from Handel's own *Dixit Dominus* of three decades earlier. The Egyptians are overwhelmed in a splendid, thunderous movement where the waves lash upwards and forwards in surging triplets in the strings and flamboyant timpani rolls. This movement is closely related to Handel's Tenth *Chandos Anthem*.

A rich tutti acknowledges the fear of the Israelites before the Lord's great work and the first half of the oratorio concludes with a reverent *colla parte* fugue, which like a number of other movements was drawn from Stradella's Serenade. This is the first of many choruses in the work that begin with an eight-part homophonic Grave or Adagio followed by a choral fugue; in each case the slow introduction emphasises the greatness of the Lord's power, always using musical materials associated with wonder and majesty.

Part Two

The Song of Moses opens with baroque pomp worthy of the greatest French Monarchs, but even more impressive is the great cry of "*Moses*" that greets us to introduce his canticle. The initial motif is Stradella's. What follows is the most splendid extravaganza in the oratorio, the equal of "*Hallelujah*" and "*For Unto Us*" in *Messiah* and the great choruses of *Judas Maccabeus*. A broad, lyrical rise for "*I will sing unto the Lord*" serves as the main fugue subject. A dancing second subject with fast roulades celebrates the great

triumph; a falling motif for the horse and rider provides decisive and very exciting contrapuntal material.

For a moment the double chorus exchange dramatic exclamations on the horse and rider in antiphony. Now Handel proudly unveils his trumpets and drums, along with grandiose trombone fanfares, and a reprise ensues in which the subject is presented in one voice and then imitated in one or more other voices, with the imitation starting before the subject has finished. The subject is therefore superimposed upon itself contrapuntally – a stretto reprise.

“The Lord is my strength and my song; He is become my salvation”: Here commences a series of borrowings from Erba's Magnificat of c.1690. A single violin part and continuo are woven around the delicate, feminine canon of the two sopranos. Toward the end, increasingly complex passagework suggests cadenza-like concluding material.

In *“He is my God, and I will prepare Him an habitation; my fathers’ God, and I will exalt Him”* there is an eight-part introduction which is more contrapuntal than the others, with a florid, Gabrieli-style ornament for the tenors of the second chorus. The fugue begins with an exposition of a slow subject in the old style, then a second exposition in faster note-values. The two subjects are juxtaposed. At the centre a homophonic statement of “He is my father's God” precedes a stretto reprise of the double fugue.

Then follows a duet for two basses: *“The Lord is a man of war”*. Drawn from the work of Erba and a Te Deum c.1700 of Francesco Urio, this warlike duet dwells on military motives in the violins with trumpet-style figuration in oboes and bassoons. The form is that of an abbreviated *da capo* aria, with the second section beginning at “His chosen captains.”

Four sub-movements follow: “1 – *The depths have covered them*; 2 – *Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in powers*; 3 – *And in the greatness of Thine excellency Thou has overthrown them that rose up against Thee*; 4 – *Thou sentest forth Thy wrath, which consumed them as stubble.*”

A slow chordal arioso with falling figures, sighs, and relentless throbbing quavers notes introduces the first section at the end of which there are two dramatic bars in which the basses sink away to a low E. An exuberant, victorious *concertante* bursts out, with full brass and timpani. At the midpoint comes yet another slow *tutti*, then what begins as a four-voice fugue on the wrath of God. The second chorus dwells on the rhythmic implication of the words “*as stubble*,” an idea that soon comes to dominate the movement.

“And with the blast of Thy nostrils, the waters were gathered together” has water-music undulations in the strings. Gradually monotonic statements take precedence, with tremolo orchestral shiverings at the word “congealed.”

Although the chorus unusually dominates this oratorio, Handel could not deny his audience a showy aria for the tenor, and here, with a decidedly heroic and military bent,

it is: *"The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my lust shall be satisfied upon them; I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them."*

In contrast, the windy figures of bassoons and oboes accompany the florid soprano aria *"Thou didst blow with the wind, the sea covered them."* The ground bass repeats itself in five bar cycles and there is an imitative exchange at the words *"they sank as lead in the mighty waters."*

The broad chorus *"Who is like unto Thee,"* (also borrowed from the work of Erba), is followed by a complex fugue for eight-part chorus at *"the earth swallowed them."* The orchestral doublings gradually increase, until the full performing force has joined in the swallowing up.

"Thou in Thy mercy has led forth Thy people, which Thou hast redeemed" is a gracious duet for alto and tenor, with a pair of violins and continuo; the resulting style is that of a trio-sonata movement.

"The people shall hear," the longest chorus in the oratorio, is held by many to be Handel's finest. The opening is quite similar in structure to *"And with His stripes"* in *Messiah*. Note the quiet terror at the repetitions of the word *"afraid."* Sorrow takes hold on the people in the form of sharp suspensions; the setting of *"all the inhabitants of Canaan"* mimics the stern rhythmic figure of the accompanying force. Melting figures pervade the next point of imitation, the greatness of the Lord's arm is a triumphant chordal passage, and the stone like stillness is set over long-held pedal points. The movement becomes memorable with the thrilling ascents of *"till Thy people pass over, O Lord."* Handel accomplishes these sensational effects without recourse to the brass and drums, skilfully holding them back for the final movement.

In order to provide a calming moment before the conclusion, Handel inserts an engaging alto aria: *"Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of Thine inheritance."* Once again the orchestral texture is that of the trio sonata, with two violin parts and continuo. This movement is governed by the three-note motif out of which the initial theme is constructed.

The affirmation that *"The Lord shall reign"* both concludes Moses' canticle and introduces Miriam's, with jubilant ornaments in the strings; unlike the other introductory Adagios, this one has a fast-moving thoroughbass. The recitative introduces a direct reprise of the big chorus, for Miriam's (much shorter) song is but a reaffirmation of Moses'.

Miriam, in clarion rising tones, proclaims Gods glory one last time, and *"The Lord shall reign"* has a second repeat. The oratorio concludes with a reprise of the great *"horse and rider"* chorus, with which the second part began. After all, if you've produced a great tune, why not use it as an encore?

Performances

In 1733 a rival opera company to Handel's, 'The Opera of the Nobility', split the audience for Italian opera in London. There was not enough support for two Italian opera companies and Handel began to find new audiences through presenting oratorio and other choral works in English. His oratorio *Saul*, with a text by Charles Jennens, was presented at the King's Theatre in January 1739, and for the same season Handel composed *Israel in Egypt*, writing the music in one month between 1 October and 1 November 1738. *Israel in Egypt* is one of only two oratorios by Handel with a text compiled exclusively from verses from the Bible, the other being *Messiah*. Both include many choruses and neither has named characters. The librettist of *Israel in Egypt* is uncertain, but most scholars believe Charles Jennens compiled both texts.

As was a common practice with Handel, *Israel in Egypt* recycles music from previous compositions he had written and also contains a number of pieces that re-work compositions by other composers. The Funeral Anthem for Queen Caroline, *The Ways of Zion do Mourn* from 1737 was slightly re-written for the opening performance and used as the first part of three sections.

But London audiences were not used to such extensive choral pieces presented as commercial entertainment. The opening dirge for the death of Joseph, thirty minutes long and adapted from the funeral anthem for the recently deceased queen probably contributed to the failure of *Israel in Egypt* at its first performance. Handel quickly revised the work, omitting the opening "Lamentations" section and adding some Italian-style arias of the kind contemporary audiences expected and enjoyed.

In its two section form, (as performed today) *Israel in Egypt* became very popular with choral societies in the 19th century. For a long time, the earliest known recording of music known to still exist was a rather turgid excerpt from a performance by several thousand singers singing "*Moses and the Children of Israel*" in the Crystal Palace Handel Festival of June 29, 1888.

However, from being the most popular choral work second only to *Messiah*, *Israel in Egypt* fell into desuetude from the beginning of the 20th century onwards. It is certainly technically challenging for orchestra and chorus alike, and the paucity of solo arias perhaps contributed to its decline, eclipsed by the great more modern choral works commissioned from Mendelssohn and then Elgar and others by the still flourishing Festival Choruses.

Now, the resurgence of the Early Music movement and modern, more exciting performance practice has revealed this great work written almost exactly 275 years ago for what it is – a masterly, dramatic and exciting account of one of the greatest stories ever told.

John Naylor (with acknowledgements to D. Kern Holoman and James Francher)

Nantwich Choral Society

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Leon King Ken Mitchell	Viola
David Hatcher Rachel Gray	Cello
Mike Escreet	Bass
Mark Baigent Cait Walker	Oboe
Robert Percival Sally Holman	Bassoon
Adrian Woodward Wendy Jones	Trumpet
Stephanie Dyer Kate Furlong Andy Lester	Sackbut
Matt Green	Tympani
David Francis	Harpsichord

JANET OLLIER – soprano

Janet has been singing since she started singing lessons at the age of nine followed by early studies at The Royal Northern College of Music. She has sung in church choirs, Dorinthian Girls' Choir, Cheshire Youth Choir, (where she met her husband), Enfield Choral society, The London Oriana Choir, the Collegiate Singers and she was also a founding member of The Joyful Company of Singers before her return North from Hertfordshire. Since 1989 she has been a member of the Lydian Singers.

In all of these she has undertaken solo work and has been the guest soloist with local choirs and given concerts for many charitable causes, including several performances of *Messiah* (including NCS) as the soprano soloist. She made a notable contribution to the NCS performance of Bach's *St John Passion* as the soprano soloist. She combines a busy professional and family life with extensive music making.

SUZANNE WINTER – soprano

Suzanne has been singing and playing the piano since the age of 10 and studied music at The University of Sheffield and then as a Post Graduate at The University of Birmingham. She worked for many years as a peripatetic singing teacher followed by 12 years as Head of Music at a large Comprehensive school in Sheffield. She has always enjoyed a semi professional and amateur career on the concert platform and in staged performances of Opera and Operetta. She has been lucky enough to perform many soprano soubrette roles including: Adele in *Die Fledermaus*, Susannah in Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro*, Zerlina in *Don Giovanni*, Despina in *Così fan Tutte* and Musetta in *La Bohème* by Puccini. Her Gilbert and Sullivan roles include: Mabel (*Pirates of Penzance*) Yum Yum (*The Mikado*) Phyllis (*Iolanthe*) Gianetta and Casilda (*The Gondoliers*). She has also performed the role of Anna in Lehar's *The Merry Widow*.

Suzanne has also had the pleasure of conducting a wide range of choral groups including adult and youth choirs winning awards at prestigious festivals including the Llangollen Eisteddfod. She now works as a private singing teacher and sings regularly as a member of The Lydian Singers.

Her recent solo appearances include Mozart's *Mass in C* and Mozart's *Requiem* as well as Schubert's *Mass in G*, Rossini's *Petite Messe Solennelle* and the Duruflé *Requiem* in Coventry Cathedral with The Lydian Singers. This is Suzanne's first appearance with Nantwich Choral Society.

SUSAN MARRS – mezzo soprano

Susan graduated from Trinity College of Music, London in 1993, after winning The Ricordi Opera Prize and The Trinity College Singing Department Prize. Her oratorio repertoire includes performances of Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* (at Ypres Cathedral, Belgium), *The Kingdom* and *The Apostles*, Verdi's *Requiem*, Dvorak's *Stabat Mater*, Mozart's *Requiem* and *C Minor Mass*, Bach's *Mass in B Minor* and *St. Matthew Passion*, Handel's *Messiah* and *Dixit Dominus*, Haydn's *Nelson Mass* and *Paukenmesse*, the Vivaldi *Gloria*, Rossini's *Petite Messe Solennelle* and *Stabat*

Mater and Prokofiev's *Alexander Nevsky*. Opera roles have included Cherubino in Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* for British Youth Opera and Mrs Noye in Britten's *Noye's Fludde* at The Royal Albert Hall.

Susan has enjoyed twelve years as a member of the Extra Chorus at The Royal Opera House, Covent Garden and recent performances have included Wagner's *Parsifal*, Verdi's *Simon Boccanegra*, Britten's *Peter Grimes* and Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*. Susan has also sung for English National Opera in their production of *The Pearlfishers*.

Susan sings with "London Voices" under the direction of Terry Edwards, and has participated in numerous concerts and recordings in London and Europe of works by Bach, Stravinsky, Pierre Boulez, John Tavener and Sir Michael Tippett, among others, and several works conducted by the late Sir Georg Solti, Sir Simon Rattle, Seiji Ozawa and the late Richard Hickox. Film score recordings have included *Star Wars*, *Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter* and *The Phantom of the Opera*. She has just returned from the very interesting experience of performances of Britten's *Peter Grimes* in China.

Recent solo appearances have included performances of Verdi's *Requiem*, Vaughan William's *Hodie*, Elgar's *Sea Pictures*, Bach's *B Minor Mass*, and *St. Matthew Passion*, and Elgar's *The Music Makers*. Appearances with Nantwich Choral Society have included *Elijah* in November 2005 and *Messiah* in 2005 and 2009, *The Dream of Gerontius* in 2009, *Even Such is Time* in 2011 and *The Armed Man* in 2007 and 2013. Susan is a Fellow of Trinity College, London.

STEPHEN NEWLOVE – tenor

Stephen Newlove was born in Drifffield, East Yorkshire and sang as a chorister in Beverley Minster before studying for a music degree at Huddersfield, followed by a Masters in composition at the University of Hull. As an experienced singer in the choirs of York Minster, Chester and Manchester Cathedrals, Stephen has broadcast on radio and television and featured on a number of acclaimed recordings. He has also sung with the Britten Singers.

Stephen's repertoire covers all eras of music from the renaissance through to the twentieth century; from Monteverdi to Maxwell Davies. Solo engagements include Monteverdi *Vespers of 1610* with the Orchestra of the Golden Age and His Majesty's Sagbutts and Cornetts, arias in Bach *St John Passion* with the English Haydn Orchestra and *Mass in B minor* with Manchester Camerata, Evangelist in *St Matthew* and *John Passions*, arias and Evangelist in *Christmas Oratorio*, *Magnificat* plus numerous Bach cantatas.

In recent times memorable performances have included Handel *Saul* and *Passion of Christ*, Charpentier *Messe de Minuit pour Noël*, the Haydn masses, Mozart *Requiem* and *Great C minor Mass*, Schubert *Mass in E flat* and *G*, Rossini *Petite Messe Solennelle*, *Stabat Mater*, Dvorak *Stabat Mater*, *Mass in D* and *Requiem*, Mendelssohn *Elijah*, *St Paul* and *Hymn of Praise*, Puccini *Messe Di Gloria*, Verdi *Requiem*, Janacek *Otcenas*, Elgar *The Kingdom*, George Dyson *Canterbury Pilgrims*, Britten *St Nicolas Cantata*, Ramírez *Misa Criolla*, Peter Maxwell Davies *Solstice of Light*.

Stephen has been invited to perform with many choral societies throughout the country including East Riding County Choir, Birmingham and Bradford Festival Choral Societies, Carlisle International Summer Festival, Ripon, Harrogate and Ludlow Choral Societies.

Members of Nantwich Choral Society recall with great pleasure Stephen's superb performances of the notoriously challenging tenor arias in the Society's performance of *Bach's St John Passion* in April 2006 and Mozart's *Requiem* in November 2007 and *Messiah* in 2012.

JAMES HALL – baritone

Born in Oxfordshire, James practices as a Chartered Surveyor in Cheshire. As a chorister at Christ Church Cathedral School in Oxford, he sang at Exeter College Chapel and Christ Church Cathedral under the direction of Simon Preston and Francis Grier. During that period he toured with the choir in Belgium and performed at its first promenade concerts with Christopher Hogwood and The Academy of Ancient Music, together with the Soprano, Emma Kirkby. James also sang with Peter Pears in St Nicholas and performed in Benjamin Britten's *Gloriana*.

After leaving Oxford, James attended Pangbourne Nautical College where the choir toured in Holland and he joined a choral course at Uppingham College, under the direction of Ralph Allwood. He then studied Land Agency at the Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester where he directed the College Choir.

Based near Whitchurch, James now sings and is assistant conductor with the Border Singers under Simon Davis and directs the chamber choir, Vox Vocavit. He has been Baritone soloist with the Malpas Festival Choir performing Mozart's *Requiem*, Handel's *Messiah* and Vivaldi's *Gloria*. He has sung the role of Pilate in both of Bach's Passions (most recently St Matthew and previously St John) in Chester cathedral with NCS.

MATHIEU POTOT – bass/baritone

After initial piano and singing studies at the Conservatoire du Mâconnais Val de Saône Mathieu was successively winner of the first prize for music studies and singing in 2008-2009. In 2010 he was awarded the State Diploma in Music Studies and for three years he has taught at the Conservatoire à Rayonnement Régional de Chalon sur Saône.

Mathieu directs several choirs (a male voice choir, ladies choir, mixed voice choir and children's choir) and he has been Music Director of L'Ensemble Vocal Arpège de Mâcon since September 2010 with whom he has performed Charpentier's *Messe de Minuit* and works by J.S. Bach.

In May last year Mathieu conducted the Arpège de Mâcon and NCS in a joint performance of Mozart's *Coronation Mass* in St Vincent's Cathedral Mâcon and appeared as the bass soloist in a return performance in St Mary's Nantwich. Other recent solo appearances include Fauré's *Requiem*, and with NCS, Peter in Bach's *St Matthew Passion*.

Mathieu is currently following a course of advanced vocal studies at The Haute Ecole de Musique de Genève (Geneva University of Music).

THE 18TH CENTURY SINFONIA

The 18th Century Sinfonia is a versatile ensemble of specialist period instrumentalists, and since their foundation in 2001 they have accompanied numerous choral societies throughout the UK. Much in demand, their recent engagements have included performances of Haydn's *Creation* and *Nelson Mass*, Handel's *Messiah*, and *Coronation Anthems*, Bach's *Magnificat* and Mozart's *Solemn Vespers* and *C minor Mass*. Other key works in their repertoire are Monteverdi's *Vespers of 1610*, Bach's *Passions*, *Christmas Oratorio*, *B-minor Mass*, Mozart's *Requiem* and a number of Handel's *Oratorios*, including *Samson* and *Solomon*. The principal players of the 18th Century Sinfonia also meet to comprise the 18th Century Concert Orchestra, whose performances combine period instruments, readings, candlelight and sumptuous 18th-century costume in uniquely atmospheric recreations of 18th century musical life.

Memorable performances with NCS have included Mozart *Vespers*, Monteverdi *Vespers*, Handel *Messiah*, *Coronation Anthems* and *Dettingen Te Deum*, and Bach's *St John* and *St Matthew Passions* in Chester cathedral.

Their website is www.18thcentury.co.uk

JOHN NAYLOR – conductor

As conductor, singer and organist, John combines extensive performance experience in world-class choirs with a lifelong passionate interest in choral music and its performance. Following a successful business career he now devotes most of his activities to conducting and choir development. His original training was as a choral scholar at St John's College, Cambridge with the great Dr George Guest after keyboard studies with Conrad Eden at Durham Cathedral where he was a chorister, a music scholarship at Rossall School and singing studies with Wilfrid Brown and Lyndon van der Pump from The Royal College of Music.

He subsequently became a professional member of the Chapel Royal Choir of St Peter ad Vincula at H.M. Tower of London and The Monteverdi Choir and Louis Halsey Singers, appearing at The Proms, The South Bank, The Aldeburgh Festival and in numerous broadcasts and recordings. He has sung in the cathedral choirs of Carlisle, Christ Church Oxford and Chester where until recently he could still be occasionally spotted on the back row!

John has been Director of The Lydian Singers since founding the choir in 1980. They are now one of the leading chamber choirs in the North West and have performed extensively in the North West, Spain, France, Italy and in most of the cathedrals in Great Britain, often returning several times by invitation.

John was appointed Music Director of Nantwich Choral Society in September 2005 for whom he has now conducted highly acclaimed performances of works in the mainstream choral repertoire including Mendelssohn's *'Elijah'*, Bach's *St John Passion* (in Chester Cathedral), and Monteverdi's *Vespers of 1610*, Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms*, Fauré's *Requiem*, Karl Jenkins' *The Armed Man* with Ensemble Vocal Arpège de Mâcon, Mozart's *Requiem* and Bach's *B minor Mass* with the 18th Century Concert Orchestra and in 2009 Haydn's *The Seasons* and *The Dream of Gerontius* in Chester cathedral with the Northern Concordia Orchestra and in 2010 Handel *Coronation Anthems* and the *Dettingen Te Deum* with the 18th Century Sinfonia.

John was also conductor of Newport Male Voice Choir from 2004 – 2009 and of The Phoenix Singers of Shrewsbury from 2009 - 2011 with whom he performed works by Britten, Poulenc, Tavener and Hindemith, first performances of the winning works in The Phoenix International Choral Composition Competition and critically acclaimed performances of Bach's *St Matthew Passion* in Shrewsbury Abbey and Brahms' *Requiem* in St Chad's Shrewsbury.

John's conducting engagements in 2011 included several performances of *Messiah*, the first performance of *Even such is Time*, a new commissioned work by Andrew Mildinhall, three performances of Fauré's *Requiem*, Rossini's *Petite Messe Solonelle*, Haydn's *Creation*, performances of Motets by Poulenc, Britten and Messaien, Blackburn and Liverpool Metropolitan cathedrals with The Lydian Singers, and a memorable performance of Monteverdi's *Vespers of 1610* with the Phoenix Singers and the English Sackbutt and Cornett Ensemble.

2012 included Vaughan Williams' *Sea Symphony* and *The Lark Ascending* with the Northern Concordia Orchestra, Mozart's *Coronation Mass* and *Vespers* in Macon and Nantwich, *Messiah* with The 18th Century Sinfonia, Coventry cathedral with The Open University Chapel Choir and with the Lydian Singers and The Lydian Ensemble works by Buxtehude, Monteverdi and Mozart followed by Bangor and Lichfield cathedrals. In June he conducted the first performance of a new chamber orchestra version of Andrew Mildinhall's *Even Such is Time* with The Lydian Singers at The Lymm Festival.

2013 has included Bach's *St Matthew Passion* in Chester Cathedral with The 18th Century Sinfonia, Karl Jenkins' *The Armed Man* and Puccini's *Messe di Gloria* with Nantwich Choral Society, St Alban's, Peterborough and Coventry (Durufié's *Requiem*) cathedrals with The Lydian Singers and Guildford cathedral with The Open University Chapel Choir.

Plans for 2014 include Elgar *Enigma Variations* with The Northern Concordia Orchestra, *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast* and Karl Jenkins' *The Peacemakers* with NCS, Exeter and Lichfield cathedrals with The Open University Chapel Choir, and a first performance of a new Andrew Mildinhall work at the summer Lymm Festival with The Lydian Singers.

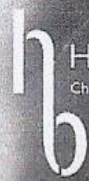
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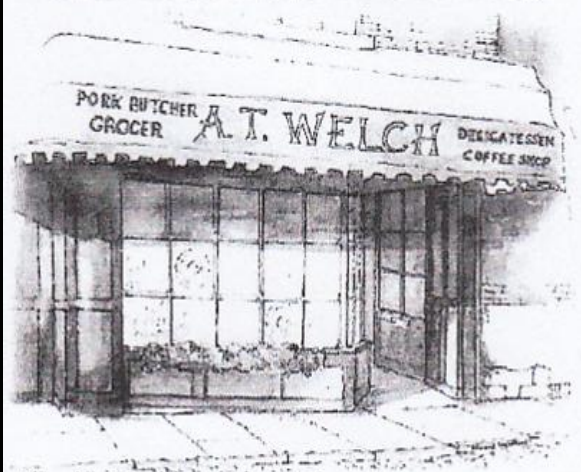


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Family Christmas Concert

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Elgar: ***From the Bavarian Highlands, Enigma Variations***
Coleridge Taylor: ***Hiawatha's Wedding Feast***

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