

# WIGMORE HALL

Sunday 2 April 2023  
7.00pm

## Handel's Messiah: Dublin 1742

### Irish Baroque Orchestra

Peter Whelan artistic director

Matthew Truscott violin I

Alice Earll violin I

Marja Gaynor violin I

Henry Tong violin II

Anita Vedres violin II

Oliver Wilson viola

Sarah McMahon cello

Aoife Nic Athlaoich cello

Malachy Robinson double bass

Malcolm Proud organ

Darren Cornish Moore trumpet

Paul Bosworth trumpet

Robert Kendall timpani

Hilary Cronin soprano

Alison Ponsford-Hill soprano

Julie Cooper soprano

Helen Charlston alto

Mark Chambers alto

Nathan Mercieca alto

Anthony Gregory tenor

Stuart Kinsella tenor

Tom Kelly tenor

Edward Grint bass

Frederick Long bass

Dan D'Souza bass

George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

Messiah HWV56 (Dublin version) (1742)



The artists are kindly supported by Isabella de Sabata and Culture Ireland - promoting Irish arts worldwide. The Irish Baroque Orchestra receives principal funding from Arts Council Ireland/An Chomhairle Ealaíon.

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In April 1741, **Handel** gave the last performance of his career as a composer of opera. *Deidamia* only enjoyed three performances at the Lincoln's Inn Fields theatre and sounded the death-knell of an operatic career that had been in decline for some time, due in part to a general cooling of English public love for Italian opera. It had also come, though, as a result of Handel's own propensity to fall out with his singers, and after the establishment of an opera house by Prince Frederick to rival that of his parents, the Prince had poached all Handel's best voices and thrown him out of the opera house in the process.

What happened after the final performance of *Deidamia* is one of the few genuinely mystifying holes in Handel's otherwise detailed and complete biography. There is some suggestion that he retreated to rural Leicestershire and the country house of his patron and librettist, the industrialist Charles Jennens. Although it cannot be certain that this was, in fact, what he did, since Handel only reappears in August that year by way of his signature on a joint venture with Jennens entitled simply *Messiah*, this remains the most likely explanation of how he spent the months after his embarrassment at the Opera of the Nobility. Whatever happened over that summer of 1741, it is clear that Handel had become so jaded and drained by the increasing antipathy of London's elitist audiences that in November he was happy to accept an invitation to visit Dublin that had been extended to him by the city's Lord Lieutenant.

Bad weather in Chester delayed the departure of Handel's boat to Dublin, and he was forced to take a room at a pub called the Golden Falcon for a few days while it cleared. A young Charles Burney, then only a schoolboy, wrote that he observed Handel 'smoking a pipe over a dish of coffee, at the Exchange Coffee-house', and that he used the time he had to wait by searching out Edmund Baker, organist of Chester Cathedral, to ask if he could borrow some lay clerks to 'try over the chorus which he intended to perform in Ireland'. As it happened, their sight-reading turned out to be less accurate than had been advertised, and Burney further recounts that after repeated failed attempts at 'And with his stripes we are healed', Handel swore at one singer in four or five different languages and shouted, 'You scoundrel! Did you not tell me you could sing at sight?' 'Yes, sir,' replied the bass, 'and so I can; but not at first sight.'

Whether any of the musicians due to meet Handel in Dublin and also stranded at Chester knew well enough to avoid these read-throughs in the Falcon's back room is impossible to say. However, the newspapers charting the composer's progress towards Ireland noted the simultaneous arrival of some other famous names, come to perform as part of his visit. These included Christina Maria Avoglio, an acclaimed Italian soprano yet to fall out fully with Handel and therefore still available, and an organist named Mr Mclean (who had given a recital in Chester while waiting for the boat)

travelling with his wife, a singer. Once established in Dublin, Handel crossed paths with a further number of musicians that impressed him greatly, including the singers of its two professional cathedral choirs, and the instrumentalists working under Matthew Dubourg, a former friend from London and master and composer to His Majesty's Band in Ireland. Handel was enormously encouraged by the warmth of his reception, by the lofty but culturally liberated audiences, and even by their politeness as they listened intently and 'expressed their great satisfaction' with his music. His first concert showcased his extended ode *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato* and was so successful that it was extended into a set of six subscription concerts which, in turn, left audiences wanting Handel to provide them with more before he returned to England.

It was now that Handel made a careful and calculated decision. Instead of returning to London, he entered into complicated negotiations with Jonathan Swift, Dean of St Patrick's Cathedral, to mount a charity première of the unperformed score that he had brought with him and tried out on the lay clerks of Chester Cathedral. Without telling Jennens, on 13 April 1742 *Messiah* was premièred in the music hall on Fishamble Street to an audience so big and appreciative that many of its window-panes had been removed to provide extra ventilation, and ladies had to be entreated to 'be pleased to come without Hoops, as it will greatly increase the Charity, by making Room for more Company.'

The charity in question to benefit from this performance was a consortium of the City Prison and two hospitals. Unlike performances of his music in London that were largely patronised by its social elite, one contemporary commentator on the Dublin *Messiah* noted that on this occasion 'Handel's design drew together not only all the lovers of music, but all the friends of humanity.' So rapturous was the reception, in fact, that another performance had to be put on in June before Handel was free to leave for home in August.

When Handel arrived back in London and explained himself to Jennens, his irritated patron made a number of changes to his libretto and its order, and Handel himself some further adjustments to the patchwork score to accommodate the larger forces on offer in London. *Messiah* was mounted relatively frequently in London over the course of the following decade – usually in similar and exclusive venues to his earlier operas – but to muted enthusiasm. It was not until Handel put on a charity performance in 1750 at the Foundling Hospital, of which he was a supporter, that the scale of the spiritual and communal statement made by *Messiah* was finally appreciated in his adopted home, and his standing with its audiences finally reframed and reinforced. In Dublin, though, they had loved it, and him, from the first.

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# George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

## Messiah HWV56 (Dublin version) (1742)

Liturgical text

### Part I

#### Tenor

Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.  
Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned. The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness; prepare ye the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

#### Tenor

Ev'ry valley shall be exalted, and ev'ry mountain and hill made low; the crooked straight and the rough places plain.

#### Chorus

And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

#### Bass

Thus saith the Lord, the Lord of hosts: Yet once a little while and I will shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. And I will shake all nations; and the desire of all nations shall come.

The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple, even the messenger of the Covenant, whom you delight in; behold, He shall come, saith the Lord of hosts.

#### Bass

But who may abide the day of His coming, and who shall stand when He appeareth? For He is like a refiner's fire.

#### Chorus

And He shall purify the sons of Levi, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.

#### Alto

Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name Emmanuel, God with us.

#### Alto

O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion, get thee up into the high mountain. O thou that tellest good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, behold your God!

Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.

#### Chorus

O thou that tellest. . .

#### Bass

For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people; but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.

#### Bass

The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; and they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.

#### Chorus

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon His shoulder; and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.

#### Soprano

There were shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night.

And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were sore afraid.

#### Soprano

And the angel said unto them: 'Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.'

#### Soprano

And suddenly there was with the angel, a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying:

#### Chorus

'Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth, good will towards men.'

#### Soprano

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, thy King cometh unto thee; He is the righteous Saviour, and He shall speak peace unto the heathen.

Rejoice greatly...

#### Alto

Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing.

#### Alto

He shall feed His flock like a shepherd; and He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.

Please turn the page quietly.

Come unto Him, all ye that labour, come unto Him  
that are heavy laden, and He will give you rest.  
Take his yoke upon you, and learn of Him, for He is  
meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest unto  
your souls.

*Chorus*

His yoke is easy, and His burden is light.

## Part II

*Chorus*

Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of  
the world.

*Alto*

He was despised and rejected of men, a man of  
sorrows and acquainted with grief.

He gave His back to the smiters, and His cheeks to  
them that plucked off His hair: He hid not His face  
from shame and spitting.

He was despised...

*Chorus*

Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our  
sorrows! He was wounded for our transgressions,  
He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement  
of our peace was upon Him.

*Chorus*

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned  
every one to his own way. And the Lord hath laid  
on Him the iniquity of us all.

*Tenor*

All they that see Him laugh Him to scorn; they shoot  
out their lips, and shake their heads, saying:

*Chorus*

'He trusted in God that He would deliver Him; let Him  
deliver Him, if He delight in Him.'

*Tenor*

Thy rebuke hath broken His heart: He is full of  
heaviness. He looked for some to have pity on  
Him, but there was no man, neither found He any  
to comfort him.

*Tenor*

Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto His  
sorrow.

*Tenor*

He was cut off out of the land of the living: for the  
transgressions of Thy people was He stricken.

*Tenor*

But Thou didst not leave His soul in hell; nor didst  
Thou suffer Thy Holy One to see corruption.

*Chorus*

Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye  
everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come  
in. Who is this King of Glory? The Lord strong and  
mighty, The Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your  
heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting  
doors; and the King of Glory shall come in. Who is  
this King of Glory? The Lord of Hosts, He is the  
King of Glory.

*Tenor*

Unto which of the angels said He at any time: 'Thou  
art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee?'

*Chorus*

Let all the angels of God worship Him.

*Bass*

Thou art gone up on high; Thou hast led captivity  
captive, and received gifts for men; yea, even from  
Thine enemies, that the Lord God might dwell  
among them.

*Chorus*

The Lord gave the word; great was the company of  
the preachers.

*Alto Duet*

How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the  
gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good  
things.

*Chorus*

Break forth into joy. Glad tidings, thy God reigneth.

*Bass*

Why do the nations so furiously rage together, and  
why do the people imagine a vain thing? The kings  
of the earth rise up, and the rulers take counsel  
together against the Lord, and against His  
anointed.

*Chorus*

Let us break their bonds asunder, and cast away  
their yokes from us.

*Tenor*

He that dwelleth in Heav'n shall laugh them to scorn;  
The Lord shall have them in derision. Thou shalt  
break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them  
in pieces like a potter's vessel.

*Chorus*

Hallelujah: for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth.

The kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of  
our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign for  
ever and ever.

King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.

Hallelujah!

### Part III

#### *Soprano*

I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.

For now is Christ risen from the dead, the first fruits of them that sleep.

#### *Chorus*

Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

#### *Bass*

Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.

#### *Bass*

The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption and this mortal must put on immortality.

The trumpet...

#### *Alto*

Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory.'

#### *Alto and Tenor*

O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law.

#### *Chorus*

But thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

#### *Alto*

If God be for us, who can be against us?

Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?

It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is at the right hand of God, who makes intercession for us.

#### *Chorus*

Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, and hath redeemed us to God by His blood, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. Blessing and honour, glory and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever. Amen.