



CHOR
AMICA

Handel's MESSIAH



HUGH VAN PELT, CONDUCTOR

7:30PM

SUNDAY DECEMBER 12TH 2021

OAKRIDGE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

WWW.CHORAMICA.CA

Chor Amica presents

Handel's Messiah

Conducted by Hugh Van Pelt

7:30pm, Sunday December 12th 2021

Oakridge Presbyterian Church

We hope you enjoy tonight's performance. Please note that there will be no intermission.

Audience members are requested to wear a mask over their nose and mouth while inside the church building, and to maintain a safe distance (2 metres recommended) from those who are not with their own group.

Thank you to our donors

We would like to express our gratitude to all the donors who have helped make this concert possible:

Pat and Roger Brown, Nancy Corbett, Richard Corner, Tim Firth, Tony Gartshore, Brian McMillan, Bruce Morton, Lisa Philpott, Natasha Regehr, John Worthington.

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Messiah, by George Frideric Handel

Part One

Sinfonia

Comfort ye my people – Robert MacLaren, tenor

Ev'ry valley shall be exalted – Robert MacLaren, tenor

And the glory of the Lord

Thus saith the Lord – Richard Corner, bass

But who may abide the day of his coming? – John Worthington, bass

And He shall purify

Behold, a virgin shall conceive – Carmen Specht, alto

For unto us a child is born

Pifa

There were shepherds abiding in the field – Ariel Harwood-Jones, soprano

And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them – Ariel Harwood-Jones, soprano

And suddenly there was with the angel

Glory to God

Rejoice greatly, o daughter of Zion – Ariel Harwood-Jones, soprano

His yoke is easy, and his burthen is light

Part Two

Behold the Lamb of God

He was despised – Pat Brown, alto

Surely he hath borne our griefs

And with his stripes we are healed

All we like sheep

All they that see him laugh him to scorn – Robert MacLaren, tenor

He trusted in God

How beautiful are the feet – Victoria Piovesan, soprano

Hallelujah

Part Three

I know that my redeemer liveth – Holly Kelly, soprano

Since by man came death

Worthy is the Lamb that was slain

Programme notes

The two greatest Baroque composers, George Frideric Handel and Johann Sebastian Bach, were both born in Germany in 1685. Their careers, however, could not have been more different. While Bach dedicated his life to church music, Handel was taken by the stage, excelling first in the Italian opera tradition, then later inventing the English oratorio. Born in Halle, Handel moved to London in 1710, just as a fever for Italian opera swept through English audiences. He composed the first Italian-language opera expressly written for a London theatre (*Rinaldo*, 1711), and spent the next three decades feeding the audience's appetite for such works. By the 1730s, however, the popularity of these extravagant operas began to wane: a rising piety among London's upper crust disapproved of the mythological tales recounted in Handel's operas while bawdy parodies, such as John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*, mocked their perceived pomposity. Audiences began to dwindle.

To regain his public, Handel turned to the oratorio, an unstaged musical dramatization of a religious or moral story, a genre he had dabbled in during his journeyman years in Rome. Although resorting to an Italian musical tradition may seem counterintuitive at a time when London audiences were seeking more English diversions, Handel took care to instill a distinct Englishness in his new compositions. First, he set English texts; second, he boosted the role of the chorus (choral singing has long been a proud English tradition). The combined effect of Handel's musico-dramatic skills married to a morally uplifting story successfully revived Handel's reputation.

Interestingly, the *Messiah* stands quite apart from many of Handel's other oratorios. For example, he composed the work not for London, but for Dublin, where he spent the 1742 Lenten season (when oratorios were principally scheduled due to the royal ban on secular theatrical performances). More fundamentally, the *Messiah* does not "tell" a story; instead, the oratorio is a rumination on the promise of a Saviour and its realization in the birth, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. To this end, the soloists do not take on specific roles and the text is an assemblage of brief Biblical verses selected from various books in both the Old and New Testaments. Nonetheless, the Irish public received the *Messiah* rapturously. The work premiered in London the following season and quickly became a staple of musical seasons both there and abroad.

Yet the work we know today is markedly different from those versions heard in the earliest performances. Revisions were simply a fact of life for any 18th-century composer, and Handel reworked movements of his latest oratorio for both aesthetic and practical reasons. The *Messiah* was very much a work in progress for more than a decade after its premiere: Handel revised arias to flatter a soloist's vocal strengths (or disguise his weaknesses) and adjusted instrumentation to suit the musicians he had at hand. And this tradition continued after Handel's death. Mozart famously arranged the oratorio for a 1789 performance, setting German text and creating new parts for flute, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, horns, trombones, trumpets, and timpani. As musicologist Donald Burrows states, "[There] are good reasons for regarding [Handel's] initial autograph [score] as a kind of abstract for the work as it would eventually come to performance."

This year, Handel's *Messiah* arrives in a form few of us could have imagined before the COVID-19 pandemic. To meet current health guidelines, the musicians and audience are vaccinated, masked, and socially distanced, and we've concocted an abridged selection of movements to provide a brief, safe concert experience without intermission. The cuts we've made to the score are out of necessity, but – as history tells us – not unprecedented.

To close, allow us one last ironic look back at the historical record. Advance notice of *Messiah*'s premiere in the *Dublin Journal* instructed ticket-holders to leave their hoop-framed skirts and swords at home to allow for the greatest audience capacity possible. This year, however, we encourage you to use any sartorial means at your disposal to maintain physical distance!

Brian McMillan

Hugh Van Pelt

Chor Amica is delighted to welcome Hugh Van Pelt as guest conductor for tonight's performance.

Hugh Van Pelt is the founding artistic director of Choral Connection, with experience encompassing both choral and orchestral conducting. Prior to his current involvement with Choral Connection, Mr. Van Pelt directed the St. Thomas Youth Choir, with whom he prepared five European Tours spanning nine countries. He has conducted choirs in many of Europe's most famous cathedrals, including Westminster Abbey, St Paul's Cathedral, Cologne Cathedral and Coventry Cathedral. Highlights include conducting at the International Shrewsbury festival, the Rastaat Festival in Baden, Germany, and the Bray Jazz Festival in Ireland. Hugh has collaborated with other choirs including the Trelawnd Male Choir in Rhyl, Wales, and the Chor des Theodor-Heuss-Gymnasium, Germany.

Past tenor solo engagements include performances of Bach's *Magnificat* with the Gerald Fagan Singers, Mozart's *Requiem* with the London Singers, Mozart's *Mass in C*, Puccini's *Messa di Gloria* (with Choral Connection), Schubert's *Mass in G* with the Elgin Choral Society and Jenkin's *The Armed Man: Mass for Peace* with Fanshawe Chorus London. Hugh has had the pleasure of performing Handel's *Messiah* with a number of organizations, most recently with Arcady, the Gerald Fagan Singers, Fanshawe Chorus London, Karen Schuessler Singers, Clarion Symphony and the International Symphony in Sarnia and Port Huron. Internationally, Hugh has performed Schubert's *Mass in G* with the Theodor Heuss Gymnasium Chor in Esselingen, Germany and Mozart's *Mass in C* as part of the International Shrewsbury Festival. A personal highlight was the British Isles' premiere of Boccherini's *Gloria*.

Pat Brown

Pat Brown grew up in Toronto and has an ARCT in Piano Performance. She has sung with the Ontario Youth Choir and Toronto Mendelssohn Choir. She was a church cantor for 31 years in Mississauga. Upon her retirement to London in 2016 Gerald Fagan welcomed her into Chor Amica.

Richard Corner

Richard started singing as a boy in London, England, performing in the original West End production of *Evita* and touring as a treble soloist, singing under conductors including Zubin Mehta and Mstislav Rostropovich. As a bass he has sung with the Holst Singers (a highlight being the world premiere of John Tavener's seven-hour vigil, *The Veil of the Temple*), The Choir of Merton College Oxford, the Schola Cantorum of Oxford, the Brighton Singers, the Brighton Festival Chorus, the Gerald Fagan Singers and church and cathedral choirs in the UK and Canada.

Ariel Harwood Jones

Ms. Harwood-Jones received her formal education at the University of Toronto, earning a Bachelor of Music in Performance. She has performed for many prestigious organizations, including the Elmer Iseler Singers, the Elora Festival Singers, and Tafelmusik Chamber Choir for 15 years. In 2014, she moved to London to continue her education. Since 2016, she has been focusing on using her extensive knowledge of Early Music to develop a new ensemble called Kammerchor London, where she performs, manages, and directs. In 2020 and 2021 she was nominated to the Forest City London Music Awards in the Classical Vocal Solo category.

Holly Kelly

Holly Kelly studied at Western University, and graduated from the Master of Music Program in Voice Performance and Literature in 2013. She continues to sing and play violin within the city of London.

Robert MacLaren

From 1988 to 2004 Robert MacLaren sang as a Lyric Tenor soloist in various German Opera houses including Cologne, Dortmund, Hannover and Saarbrücken, and also in Austria and Switzerland. His repertoire included many oratorio works and recital performances. Robert joined the Desautel Faculty of Music at the University of Manitoba where he taught Vocal Technique for 14 years. He is now retired and living in London Ontario. Robert is originally from Montréal where he sang with the Tudor Singers and was soloist at the Church of St. Andrew and St. Paul.

Victoria Piovesan

With a Master's in Vocal Performance from Western University, Victoria teaches music and sings in choirs in London.

Carmen Specht

Carmen Specht is in her final year of the Doctorate of Music Performance program at Western University, under Dr. Sophie Louise Roland and Simone Luti. Her recent operatic roles include Suzuki in Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* with Windsor Symphony, and the title role in Puccini's *Suor Angelica* with Western University's Opera Workshop. She was Alto Soloist with Fanshawe Chorus London in their performance of Beethoven's *Mass in C* and has performed at festivals around the world. Beyond thankful to return to the stage after a year, Carmen will also be Alto Soloist in the *Messiah* with London Pro Musica and Choral Connection, and will perform her final Doctorate recitals including Wagner's *Wesendonck Lieder* and Mahler's *Das Knaben Wunderhorn*.

John Worthington

John Worthington, bass-baritone, has extensive experience singing with choral groups in Southwestern Ontario and Michigan. He has been Bass Soloist with the International Symphony Orchestra of Sarnia and Port Huron in several of their major productions. John has performed in many musical theatre productions in lead roles. Over the years he has enjoyed performing in recitals as soloist and in small ensembles. He is currently singing with the I.S.O choir and lives in Wallaceburg Ontario.

Chor Amica

Soprano: Aimee Gavin, Ariel Harwood-Jones, Holly Kelly, Shannon Kuiack, Karianne Pasma, Victoria Piovesan, Danielle Sirek

Alto: Caroline Breedyk-Tanner, Pat Brown, Nancy Corbett, Alexandra Mara, Hana Mara, Lisa Philpott, Natasha Regehr, Carmen Specht

Tenor: Tony Gartshore, Friedhelm Hoffmann, Robert MacLaren, Christopher Ryan

Bass: Roger Brown, Richard Corner, Tim Firth, Brian McMillan, Emer Montaña, Bruce Morton, John Worthington

Orchestra

Mikela Witjes (Concertmaster), Jordan Clayton (violin 1); Brennan Van Pelt, Jillian Yang (violin 2); Heather Braden, Katie McBean (viola); Jillian Sauertieg (cello); Joe Phillips (bass); Lucy Van Pelt (continuo).



Thank you for joining us tonight! We hope to see you again at our next concert:

Earth Speaks
Sunday 10th April 2022
Patrick Murray, conductor

A programme of works by living composers, offering a reflection on our mutual responsibility to the planet and our future amidst the climate crisis.

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