

‘The Subject is Messiah’

First performed 280 years ago, Handel’s oratorio remains a seasonal favorite. This celebration of ‘Messiah’ outlines its creation, the composer’s life and includes a little ‘sing-along’ of its magnificent music.

An illustrated lecture presented by Dulais Rhys, Ph.D

What would Christmas be without Handel’s *Messiah*?

If you are fortunate enough to have sung this beloved oratorio or maybe attended a performance (professional or ‘from-scratch’) or have only heard excerpts, people of all faiths appreciate the depth of emotion and sacred significance of Handel’s magnificent work.

Some *Messiah* music has become world-famous to musicians and non-musicians alike, such as the ‘Hallelujah Chorus’; other choruses are more familiar to choristers (such as ‘For Unto Us A Child Is Born’) and most soloists know or have performed arias such as ‘I Know That My Redeemer Liveth’.

But the complete oratorio is much more than the sum of its famous parts.

A resident of London for almost three decades, in 1741, Handel was given the words to *Messiah: an oratorio* by English librettist Charles Jennens, author of many sacred and secular vocal works. Selecting passages from the King James Bible, the Coverdale Psalter and the Book of Common Prayer, Jennens created a three-part literary masterpiece: the prophecy of Jesus Christ, his Passion and the Resurrection. In an accompanying letter, Jennens modestly states: ‘The Subject is Messiah.’

Handel was so inspired by Jennens’ libretto that the music was completed in an incredible twenty-four days of frenetic composition.

Though Handel was the music darling of London’s opera-loving elite, the composer struggled to get his new oratorio performed there. In the end, the 1742 premiere of *Messiah* actually took place in Dublin. Handel had been invited to Ireland during the previous year to present a series of winter concerts in the capital city. They were so successful that in April the following year, Handel put on a charity performance of *Messiah* at The Great Music Hall on Dublin’s Fishamble Street. Compared to later large-scale performances of the oratorio, the instrumental and vocal forces used at the premiere were modest and included Handel’s own organ, shipped to Ireland for the performance.

The first performance of *Messiah* was so successful that Handel remained in Dublin for another four months in order to put on a second concert. But the enthusiastic Irish reception was not repeated in London and it took many years and dozens of performances for *Messiah* to reach the level of popularity that is undiminished to this day.

Audience members are encouraged to bring their own copy of the music and/or sing-along with some familiar choruses. Joining in is optional - no auditions!

DURATION: c1 hour

FEE: \$295.00

EXPENSES: a contribution toward travel costs is appreciated.

Thank you for considering my proposal and please contact me for more information.

Sincerely,

Dulais Rhys, Ph.D

dulaishys@gmail.com

(480)414-9654

REFERENCES, RECOMMENDATIONS & REVIEWS

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