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PERFORMANCE NOTES
by George Shangrou

In performing Messiah one must deal with the fact that Handel left very little information on how he wanted things done musically in this huge work. This fact presents conductors with a dichotomy in that a) it's great to be left with complete freedom of interpretation, but b) it would be nice to have just a few more indications as to "composer's intent." Experience with a particular composer as well as with a particular work helps the conductor to extrapolate the composer's intentions even from rather sketchy markings. For my interpretation of Messiah, in addition to consulting the many varied performance editions by other Handel conductors and scholars, I have relied heavily on a facsimile of Handel's own copy of the score for the work. In this score there may be found many pencil scratches: dynamic changes, names of soloists, slurs, alterations, etc. With this tool in hand and my experience with Handel-oratorio at my side, I set off "working at "how to do Messiah. First of all one must consider the story and its inherent drama. Jacob's in his book on Messiah has stated that the Bach Passions reflect the facts of the story whereas Handel's Messiah is the poetic aria. While Bach certainly has the artistic elements of great poetry in his composition, I basically agree with Jacob's as to the stylistic differences: Bach was writing for God and the Church, Handel was writing for the public audience and God (in that order, I think).

Handelian drama finds its expression in the tone painting: the use of melodic, textural, and harmonic devices to evoke the description, character, or feeling of a particular text. The best example of tone painting in Handel for me is probably the "flute" chorus from Israel in Egypt in which he has both the first and second violins playing very softly and with an eerie musical quality. Also watch for the signing of the sixteenth notes in the orchestra when in number 23 ("All they that see him") the chorus sings "and shake their heads." There are many more examples and it can be a very enjoyable listening session to hear all of them.

In the text area Handel brings some great excitement to the text. Listen to the burning texture during "for he is like a refiner's fire" or the dissolution in "Surely he hath borne our griefs." The crescendo and accent help to bring out these dramatic devices. By using subito (sudden) forte and piano in the orchestral accompaniment important parts of the text may be underlined — note "Why do they slay the shepherd?" One device which seems in vogue today regarding the aural performance of Baroque music is double-dotted: This process reflects taking two notes (found in a sequence of such two-note groups) and changing them from having a ratio of 3 to 1 in length to 7 to 1 in length. This is a Baroque practice written about by a number of the contemporary theorists and composers in both text and example. What many modern performers seem to miss is the direction as to how and when this double-dotting is to be used. The rule for the French Ornament style (which is what the opening Sinfonia to Messiah includes) is that only the smallest dotted note should be double-dotted. In the Sinfonia we would still have the grandness of the opening rhythm. The bars followed by eighth notes we would have the rhythmic excitement of the double-dotted of the smallest value notes (the dotted eighty-sixteenths) starting with the inner parts in the 8th bar.

This practice of double-dotting is sometimes extended to other things as well. For instance we find in the bass recitative "Thus saith the Lord" Handel very specifically written a non-dotted rhythm. I say very specifically because after he has written a dotted rhythm. It seems to me that even in his haste in composing Messiah he was able to note these small areas he wished used. Another chorus in which the rhythm is often tampered with is "Surely he hath borne our griefs." Here I find myself nothing short of irritated when the strength of the rhythm of two long notes before the short one is changed to the much weaker rhythm of short long short long. Once again the justification could be found in the fact that Handel restored the rhythm a few times in this chorus in the latter way — so one knows he used it when he wanted it.

With regard to the aural devices I have heard it said that Handel goes fast. I certainly do not dispute that the fast sections in Handel go fast, but to take all the choruses fast just to get them over with or to show the virtuosity of the choir misses the point altogether. Once again, the main consideration is the text. One of the most difficult choruses for me with regards to tempo is the very first one. After many performances (almost all of which I have taken a different tempo) I have finally come to the rather stale manner which seems to me to be best bespeak the "Glory of the Lord."

The virtuoso choruses of "He shall purify", "For unto us", "His yoke is easy", etc. demand a careful treatment to keep the florid writing clear. These are fast Handel choruses and need quick tempi. The Lenten choruses need a more leisurely treatment filled with pathos: "Behold the Lamb of God" and "And at his name". All of the choruses have a particular feeling for me, but the only other one I would like to mention is the "Amens." I take this chorus at a very slow tempo. The reasoning for this is two-fold: 1) the sonic aspects of the music support a slow tempo and 2) I don't think that a quick, flippant Amen would work. This chorus is a three-hour work. If one can get over one is used to for this final chorus, I think that the rewards are great.

There is much more to say and the editor says no more space. I think that my basic ideas are here encapsulated. I look forward to your comments and I would be very happy to discuss them in greater detail with any other Messiah addicts. I hope everyone enjoys tonight's performance of the English-speaking world's favorite oratorio.
G. F. Händel's
MESSIAH
The Broadway Symphony/Seattle Chamber Singers
George Shangrow, conductor

KAREN HALL, soprano, has performed frequently in the Pacific Northwest to high critical acclaim. She has appeared in several productions with Seattle Opera and the Seattle Symphony, and with the Civic Light Opera she performed the role of Maria in West Side Story. This Fall of 1984, she was awarded first prize in Portland Opera's Lieber Awards, and in 1983, Ms. Hall was the first place winner in both the Metropolitan and San Francisco regional auditions.

JERRY SAMS, tenor, is one of our area's outstanding performers of Baroque oratorio. A regular soloist with the Seattle Chamber Singers, Mr. Sams has sung the tenor solo in Tha Savoisi and The Creation by Haydn, several Händel works, including Messiah. Israel in Egypt, Judas Maccabaeus, Saul, and L'Allegro ed il Penseroso; by J. S. Bach, he has sung the tenor arias in the Saint Matthew Passion, the Saint John Passion, the Mass in B minor and several cantatas. He is presently a tenor soloist at the University Unitarian Church.

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PART III

45. Air
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.

46. 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.

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

48. Air
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 shall sound...
PART II.

22. Chorus
Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world.
23. Air
He was despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. He was despised . . .
24. 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.
25. Chorus
And with His stripes we are healed.
26. 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.
27. Recitative
All they that see Him, laugh Him to scorn; they shoot out their lips, and shake their heads, saying—
28. Chorus
He trusted in God that He would deliver Him; let Him deliver Him, if He delight in Him.
29. Recitative
Thy rebuke hath broken His heart; He is full of heaviness.
30. Air
He looked for some to have pity on Him, but there was none; neither found He any to comfort Him.
31. Air
Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto His sorrow.
32. Air
He was cut off out of the land of the living; for the transgression of Thy people was He stricken.
33. Air
But Thou didst not leave His soul in hell; nor didst Thou suffer Thy Holy One to see corruption.
34. Chorus
Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in.

INTERMISSION—

Who is the 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.

—INTERMISSION—

George Frederick Handel’s MESSIAH
Libretto by Charles Jennens, 1742

PART I.

1. Overture
2. Recitative
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.
3. Air
Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill made low; the crooked straightened, and the rough places plain.
4. 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.
5. Recitative
Thus saith 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.
6. Air
The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in; Behold, He shall come, saith the Lord of Hosts.
7. Air
But who may abide the day of His coming, and who shall stand when He appeareth? For He is like a refiner’s fire.
8. Recitative
And He shall purify the sons of Levi, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.
9. Recitative
Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and shall call His name Emmanuel, God with us.
10. Air
O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion, get thee up on 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.
11. Air
The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: and they that dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.
12. 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.
13. Pastoral Symphony
14. Recitative
There were shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night.
15. Recitative
And the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were sore afraid.
16. Chorus
And the angel said unto them, Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.
17. Air
For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.
18. Recitative
And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying:
19. Chorus
Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.
20. Air
Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy king cometh unto thee.
21. Recitative
He is the righteous Saviour, and He shall speak peace unto the heathen.
22. Recitative
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.
23. Air
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.
24. Air
Come unto Him, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and He shall give you rest.
25. Air
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.
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His yoke is easy and His burden is light.
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What is the King of glory? The Lord of Hosts; He is the
King of glory.
34. Recitative
Unto which of the angels said He at any time, Thou art
my Son, this day have I begotten Thee?
35. Chorus
Let all the angels of God worship Him.
36. Air
Thou art gone up on high, Thou hast led captivity
captive, and received gifts for men; yea, even for Thine
enemies, that the Lord God might dwell among them.
37. Chorus
The Lord gave the word: great was the company of the
prophets.
38. Air
How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the
gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things.
39. Chorus
Their sound is gone out into all lands, and their words
unto the ends of the world.
40. Air
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.
41. Chorus
Let us break their bonds asunder, and cast away their
yokes from us.
42. Recitative
He that dwelleth in heaven shall laugh them to scorn;
the Lord shall have them in derision.
43. Air
Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; Thou shalt
dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.
44. 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!

—INTERMISSION—

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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.
10. Recitative
For, behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross
darkness the people; but the Lord shall arise upon thee,
and the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the
brightness of thy rising.

—INTERMISSION—

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light: and they that dwelt in the land of the shadow of
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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 shall sound.

49. Recitative
Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is death.
50. Duet
O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?
51. Chorus
But thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.
52. Air
If God be for us, who can be against us? who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth?
53. 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 honor, and glory, and blessing. Blessing and honor, glory and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb; for ever and ever.

THE END

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JERRY SAMS, tenor, is one of our area's outstanding performers of Baroque oratorio. A regular soloist with the Seattle Chamber Singers, Mr. Sams has sung the tenor role in The Stabat Mater and The Creation by Handel, several Händel works, including Messiah. Israel in Egypt, Judas Macchabaeus, Saul, and The Messiah ad libitum; by J. S. Bach, he has sung the tenor arias in the Saint Matthew Passion, the Saint John Passion, the Mass in B minor and several cantatas. He is presently tenor soloist at the University Unitarian Church.
In performing Messiah one must deal with the fact that Handel left very little information on how he wanted things done musically in this huge work. This fact presents conductors with a dichotomy in that a) it's great to be left with complete freedom of interpretation, but b) it would be nice to have just a few more indications as to "composer's intent." Experience with a particular instrumental composer as well as with a particular work helps the conductor to extrapolate the composer's intentions even from rather sketchy markings. For my interpretation of Messiah, in addition to consulting the many various performance editions by other Handel conductors and scholars, I have relied heavily on a facsimile of Handel's own copy of the score for the work. In this score there may be found many pencil scratchings: dynamic changes, names of soloists, diminuendo, adagio marks, etc. With this tool in hand and my experience with Handel oratorio at my side, I set off "working at" how to do Messiah. First of all one must consider the story and its inherent drama. Jacobs in his book on Messiah has stated that the Bach Passions reflect the facts of the story whereas Handel's Messiah is the poetic aria. While Bach certainly has the artistic elements of great poetry in his composition, I basically agree with Jacobs as to the stylistic differences: Bach was writing for God and the Church, Handel was writing for the public audience and God (in that order, I think).

Handelian drama finds its expression in the tone painting: the use of melodic, textural, and harmonic devices to evoke the description, character, or feeling of a particular text. The best example of tone painting in Handel for me is probably the "Flies" chorus from Israel in Egypt in which he has both the first and second violins playing horribly fast 32nd note scales in a rhythm that gets the sound of the flies buzzing all around. In Messiah we get examples of this type of writing in movements like "For behold, darkness shall cover the earth..." and the ensuing aria. Also watch for the wagging of the sixteenth notes in the orchestra when in number 29 ("All they that see him") the alto sings "and shake their heads." There are many more examples and it can be a very enjoyable listening session trying to hear all of them.

In the text-less area Handel brings some great excitement to the text. Listen to the burning texture during "for he is like a refiner's fire" or the dissolute in "Surely he hath borne our griefs" or the passion lines with accents in "Let us break their bonds." (Dynamiccontrast is just as important. The crescendo and accent help to bring these dramatic devices. By using subject (sudden) fortissimo and piano in the orchestral accompaniment important parts of the text may be underlined — note "Why do you marvel?"

One device which seems in vogue today regarding the authentic performance of Baroque music is double-dotting: This process reflects taking two notes (found in a sequence of such two-note groups) and changing them from having a ratio of 3 to 1 in length to 7 to 1 in length. This is a Baroque practice written about by a number of the contemporary theorists and composers in both text and example. What many modern performers seem to miss is the direction as to how and when this double-dotting is to be used. The rule for the French Couverture style (which is what the opening Allegro in Messiah was taken from) is that only the smallest dotted note should be double-dotted. So in the Stabat Mater we would still have the grandness of the opening ritard. Handel followed this rule and we would have the rhythmic excitement of the double-dotting of the smallest value notes (the dotted eight/sixteenths) starting with the inner parts in the 8th bar.

This practice of double-dotting is sometimes extended to other works as well. For example, I have heard it said that Handel goes fast. I certainly do not dispute that the fast sections in Handel go fast, but to take all the choruses fast just to get them over with or to show the virtuosity of the choir misses the point altogether. Once again, the main consideration is the text. One of the most difficult choruses for me with regards to tempo is the very first one. After many performances (almost all of which I have taken a different tempo) I have finally come to the rather stately minuet tempo which seems to me to best bespeak the "Glory of the Lord."

The virtuosic choruses of "He shall purify", "For unto us", "His yoke is easy", etc. demand a careful treatment to keep the florid writing clear. These are fast Handel choruses and need quick tempi. The Lenten choruses need a more leisurely treatment filled with pathos. "Behold the Lamb of God" and "And he shall reign". All of the choruses have a particular feeling for me, but the only other one I would like to mention is the "Amen." I take this chorus at a very slow tempo. The reasoning for this is two-fold: 1) the sonic aspects of the music support a slow tempo and 2) I don't think that a quick, flippant Amen would work. This has been a three-hour work. If one can get over what one is used to for this final chorus, I think that the rewards are great.

There is much more to say and the editor says no more space. I think that my basic ideas are here encapsulated. I hope it is interesting. I would be very happy to discuss them in greater detail with any other "Messiah-addict." I hope everyone enjoys tonight's performance of the English-speaking world's favorite oratorio!
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We are grateful to Kelly MacPherson for stepping in with very short notice to be our soprano soloist. Karen Hall had to cancel due to illness.
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