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SOLO ARTISTS

Soprano Catherine Hight is well known to Seattle audiences for her performances of Baroque music. She is an accomplished performer of the oratorio repertoire, including all of the major works of Handel. Ms. Hight comes from the Vancouver Opera Festival in Vivaldi, Purcell, Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, Brahms and others. For the past five years, Ms. Hight has been a guest soloist with the Pacific Northwest Ballet in their acclaimed production of Carmen. Beginning this season she will travel with them to Australia to perform as part of the Melbourne Festival in 1995, and to the Kennedy Center for three performances in 1996. Her recent recordings include: Messiah, Benjamin Britten’s War Requiem; Orff’s Carmina Burana with the Seattle Choral Company, with whom she will perform that work this New Year’s Eve; and Handel’s Messiah with the Oratorio Society, and the Seattle Chamber Singers under the direction of George Shaginian.

One of the Pacific Northwest’s premier mezzo-sopranos, Emily Lunde is a Seattle native who has sung extensively with many of the area’s finest ensembles, including the Seattle Symphony, Orchestra Seattle and the Seattle Chamber Singers, Northwest Sinfonietta, Seattle Choral Company, Choir of the Sound, Everett Symphony and Walla Walla Symphony. Ms. Lunde also performs regularly with the Pacific Northwest Ballet in their productions of The Nutcracker and A Midsummer Night’s Dream. Her repertoire runs the gamut from early music to classical and contemporary works, with a special affinity for music of the 18th century. She has performed at major Bach festivals as well as many of Handel’s fabulous oratorios, including Messiah, which she recently recorded with OSSCS. Last season Ms. Lunde was featured at Benaroya Hall in performances of Maurice Ravel’s Shéhérazade and Bach’s St. Matthew Passion with OSSCS, and in a concert performance of Deems Taylor’s Peter Ibbetson with the Seattle Symphony.

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George Frideric Handel was born in Halle, Germany, on February 23, 1685, and died in London on April 14, 1759. He composed Messiah between August 22 and September 14 of 1741. The oratorio was first performed in Dublin on April 13, 1742, under the direction of the composer. In addition to a quartet of vocal soloists and choir, the work is scored for 2 oboes, bassoon, 2 trumpets, timpani, harpsichord and strings.

Dr. Charles Burney, an 18th-century English music historian, wrote that Handel’s oratorio, Messiah, “has been heard in all parts of the kingdom with increasing reverence and delight; it has fed the hungry, clothed the naked, fostered the orphan and enriched succeeding managers of Oratories more than any single musical production in this or any other country.” We believe that your musical experience will be enriched, and that you will hear with special delight our unique interpretation of one of the most famous of all musical compositions.

George Frideric Handel, renowned in his day as an organist and as a highly prolific writer of Italian operas and English oratorios, was born in Germany in 1685 about a month before J.S. Bach. He received his musical training in Italy, and later became 18th-century England’s “national composer.” Between February and November 1741, Handel, suffering at the age of 56 from various ailments, both financial and physical, withdrew increasingly from public life. At some point that year, the composer received from the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland and the governors of Dublin’s three major charitable institutions an invitation to travel to that city to aid the charities through the performance of his music. Handel was well-known in Dublin as a church-music composer, and his works were often played there to benefit charities. It may thus have been this invitation that provided the incentive for Handel to compose “a new sacred Oratorio.” In July of 1741, Charles Jennens, who was responsible for the texts of Handel’s oratorios, Israel in Egypt and Saul, gave the struggling Handel the libretto of Messiah, a compilation of biblical texts from both the Old and New Testaments.

On the 22nd of August, Handel began to set Jennens’ text to music. He finished the first part of his new oratorio (which deals with the prophecy of Christ’s coming and his nativity) in six days, the second part (which describes Jesus’ suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension, the spread of his gospel, the resistance of the heathen, and the vision of the ultimate triumph of the gospel in the establishment of God’s kingdom) in nine days, and the third part (which celebrates the gift of resurrection and eternal life offered to all through Christ’s victory over death) in six more days, with two or three additional days for completing the orchestration. Regarding Handel’s state of mind during Messiah’s composition, biographer Jonathan Keates observes in his 1992 book, Handel: The Man and Music, that “etherealized visions of the elderly master refusing food, weeping into the semiquavers and having angelic hallucinations are mostly moonshine.” Musician and writer Christopher Hogwood admits that “The turbulent state of Handel’s manuscript, the blots, erasures and emendations that litter the page right to the final bars give enough evidence of tempestuous creation to tempt any romantic biographer.” But there is little doubt, in any event, that this enduring masterpiece, completed in 24 days on September 14, 1741, will remain among the greatest compositional feats in the history of music.

In the autumn of 1741, Handel accepted the invitation to visit Dublin, arriving there on November 18 with the completed score of Messiah in his traveling bags, but it was not until April 13, 1742, that the oratorio was premiered. Seven hundred people were able to squeeze into Dublin’s Musick Hall in Fishamble-street to hear the work performed by the choirs of Dublin’s two cathedrals (totaling fewer than forty men and boys) and the string band (reinforced occasionally by trumpets and timpani— oboe and bassoon parts were written later), all directed from the keyboard by Mr. Handel himself. The work created a sensation: “Words are wanting to express the exquisite Delight it afforded to the admiring crowded Audience,” exulted Faulkner’s Journal. “The Sublime, the Grand, and the Tender, adapted to the most elevated, majestic and moving Words, conspired to transport and charm the ravished Heart and Ear.” Handel divided his share of the proceeds (about £400), as did the other performers, among Dublin’s three most important charities.

Messiah is unique among Handel’s works, being his only biblical oratorio using texts from the New Testament, and his only “Christian-contemplative” oratorio. Although the text is not a dramatic narrative but an epic-lyric poem celebrating Christian redemption, Handel’s musical approach in setting Jennens’ libretto was decidedly dramatic. The work’s three parts recall the three acts of Italian operas, and the oratorio is indeed a piece designed by a seasoned operatic professional to “entertain,” in the best sense of the word, listeners in a concert room, not chiefly to instruct or edify a congregation or to be used in any sort of worship setting. Handel synthesizes the best elements of the three musical traditions in which he was steeped: the Italian, the German, and the English. He makes use of Italian forms of musical expression, borrowing, rearranging, and transforming into “duet-choruses” (such as “And he shall purify”) some passages from his own Italian love duets. In the “Pastoral Symphony” (entitled Pifa) that introduces the shepherds, Handel alludes to the music of the pifferari, the country bagpipers who descend the Italian mountains during the Christmas season to play in village streets. Handel employs German musical ideas, particularly in the music describing Jesus’ suffering and death, where the jagged dotted rhythms and forceful harmonies have a particularly German expressive quality. In that great “coronation march,” the “Hallelujah Chorus,” melodic fragments echoing the German chorale “Wacht auf” may be heard in “The kingdom of this world” and in “And he shall reign for ever and ever.” Handel’s melodic shapes, vocal treatment, grand anthem-like choruses, and text-setting display the “English character” that has ensured Messiah’s unchallenged supremacy in the English choral repertoire: in such arias as “He was despised” and “I know that my Redeemer liveth,” the rhythms of the music grow out of the natural speech rhythms of the words, so that the music expresses the text directly and powerfully, and then illustrates it almost visually (e.g., “Every valley shall be exalted,” “The people that walked in darkness,” and “All we like sheep”).

The easy accessibility and glorious variety of the music that results from the confluence of these elements (and which often conceals the exalted art underlying it) has helped to guarantee Messiah’s survival, through a seeming infinitude of “arrangements,” versions, and types of presentation, as one of the most popular pieces ever composed. As biographer R. A. Stratford observes, “Messiah, if not Handel’s greatest work, is undoubtedly the most universal in its appeal” because it continues to sing to “high and low, rich and poor, wise and foolish alike” a magnificent song of salvation, fresh, vital, and full of aesthetic and spiritual grace.

— Lorette Knowles
LIBRETTO

PART I

Symphony

Accompagnato
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.

Isaiah 40:1-3

Air
Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill made low: the crooked straight, and the rough places plain:

Isaiah 40:4

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.

Isaiah 40:5

Accompagnato
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.

Haggai 2:6-7

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.

Malachi 3:1

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.

Malachi 3:2

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

Malachi 3:3

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

Isaiah 7:14

Air and Chorus
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!

Isaiah 40:9

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

Isaiah 60:1

Accompagnato
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.

Isaiah 60:2-3

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

Isaiah 9:2

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.

Isaiah 9:6

Pifa (Pastoral Symphony)

Recitative – Accompagnato
There were shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock 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.

Luke 2:8-9

Recitative
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 Savior, which is Christ the Lord.

Luke 2:10-11

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

Luke 2:13

Chorus
Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth, good will toward men!

Luke 2:14

Air
Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee.

He is the righteous Savior and He shall speak peace unto the heathen.

Zechariah 9:9-10

Recitative
Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf be unstopped.

Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing.

Isaiah 35:5-36

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

Isaiah 40:11

Come unto Him, all ye that labor and 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.

Matthew 11:28-29

Chorus
His yoke is easy, His burden is light.

Matthew 11:30

PART II

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

John 1:29

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

Isaiah 53:3

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

Isaiah 50:6

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.

Isaiah 53:4-5

Chorus
And with His stripes we are healed.

Isaiah 53:5

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.

Isaiah 53:6

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

Psalms 22:7

Chorus
He trusted in God that He would deliver Him: let Him deliver Him, if He delight in Him.

Psalms 22:8

Accompagnato
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.

Psalms 69:20
SOLO ARTISTS

Soprano Catherine Haight is well known to Seattle audiences for her performances of Baroque music. She is an accomplished performer of the oratorio repertoire, including all of the major works of Handel and also two works by Vivaldi, Purcell, Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, Brahms and others. For the past five years, Ms. Haight has been a guest soloist with the Pacific Northwest Ballet in their acclaimed production of Carmina Burana. She traveled with them to Australia to perform as part of the Melbourne Festival in 1995, and to the Kennedy Center for three performances in 1996. Her recent recordings include: Messiah with Philadelphia Orchestra; Orff's Carmina Burana with the Seattle Choral Company, with whom she will perform that work this New Year's Eve; and Handel's Messiah with Orchestra Seattle and the Seattle Chamber Singers under the direction of George Shvabang.

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Tenor Stephen Wall has appeared frequently with Orchestra Seattle since 1985, when he performed as a soloist in Bach's St. Matthew Passion. He has been featured in leading and supporting roles with Seattle Opera, Portland Opera, Utah Opera Festivals, and with the Colorado Music Festival and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. Mr. Wall is featured on Orchestra Seattle's new CD release of Handel's Messiah. In January, he will appear in a supporting role in Seattle Opera's performances of Boris Godunov. Mr. Wall will rejoin OSSCS in June for a performance of Mendelssohn's Elijah.

A native of Washington, baritone Brian Box received his Masters degree in vocal performance from Western Washington University in 1985. Mr. Box performs frequently with many Northwest ensembles, including Orchestra Seattle and the Seattle Chamber Singers, Seattle Choral Company, Seattle Pro Musica, Bellevue Chamber Choir, and Choir of the Sound. He has performed with Rudolf Nureyev, singing Mahler's Songs of a Wayfarer to Mr. Nureyev's dance. Mr. Box has performed frequently with OSSCS in such works as Bach's St. Matthew Passion, St. John Passion, Christmas Oratorio, and B minor Mass, and appears on their new CD of Handel's Messiah, as well as their previous recordings of music by Bach and Vaughan Williams. The regional winner of San Francisco Opera's 1989 Merola Opera Program, he made his Seattle Opera debut as the Corporal in Donizetti's Daughter of the Regiment and has subsequently appeared as Clopin in Don Carlos, the Shepherd in Pelléas et Mélisande and Lucas' friend in The Passion of Jonathan Wade. For Tacoma Opera, Mr. Box created the role of Capitano Geronzi in Robert Spohr's The Pied Piper of Hamelin. He has also performed extensively with Seattle Opera's Education Program and Northwest Opera in the Schools.

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Emily Lunde, alto
Stephen Wall, tenor
Brian Box, baritone

Orchestra Seattle
Seattle Chamber Singers
George Shangraw, conductor

**GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL**

*Messiah*, A Sacred Oratorio 1685-1759

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