



2016-2017 Belmont Open Sings

Messiah G.F. Handel

With *Messiah*, Handel drastically changed direction from his secular Italian operas to set Biblical verses in the English vernacular for his un-staged oratorios. *Messiah* rejoices in Christ's birth, life, and resurrection, and the chorus is the star of the show (although it also includes soaring, colorful solos).

For many, it would be hard to imagine a holiday season without the Hallelujah chorus of *Messiah*. We hope you will find this piece to be spectacular, and that you will be inspired to create new traditions of your own.

About Messiah

Also an oratorio with text taken from Scripture, *Messiah* tells the story of the life and mission of Jesus Christ, beginning with prophecies from the Old Testament about the birth of Jesus, following his teachings and work throughout his life on Earth, and his death and resurrection. It is a tradition for participants and audience members to stand during the Hallelujah Chorus, which many believe King George started in 1742.



How it began...

In the 1730s, Handel was enjoying success as a composer of Italian operas in London when a rival opera company stepped onto the scene. The already declining attendance at the opera was now split even further, and Handel's company lost many of its subscribers, forcing it to look to new innovative ways of attracting audience members.

Handel then tried composing and presenting a season of oratorios in English instead of Italian, basing *Israel in Egypt* on a selection of Bible verses from Exodus and Psalms instead of the cast of characters and dialogue typically found in his Italian operas. He wrote the music in one month, borrowing from several of his own previous works, as well as those of other composers. Most scholars believe the libretto was prepared by Charles Jennens, who also worked with Handel on *Saul* and *Messiah*.

Israel in Egypt premiered in 1739 in The King's Theatre in London. At first, his new approach was a complete failure – the first of the three acts relied almost entirely on the chorus, and audiences of the time were expecting more stage time by major characters. Handel then scrambled to release a second version to salvage attendance that skipped over the first chorus-heavy part and included more solo arias. Close to 20 years later, after reworking the piece many times over, Handel finally released a version that is still celebrated today.

Charles Jennens brought the text of *Messiah* to Handel several years later, writing to a friend, "I hope [Handel] will lay out his whole Genius and Skill upon it, that the Composition may excel all his former Compositions, as the Subject excels every other Subject." It is believed that Handel found the text and the "Subject" – Jesus as the Messiah – as inspirational and uplifting as Jennens, and again composed the complete work in one month.

Hoping to avoid the embarrassment caused by the poor reception of *Israel in Egypt*, Handel premiered *Messiah* in Dublin in 1742 during the Easter season. And again he reworked the piece through many revisions over the years. Although there seems to be no one "authentic" version of the piece, *Messiah* is recognizable to the public as one of the most performed and celebrated choral works of all time.

We recommend:

See what one columnist recommends as the “best” performances
of *Messiah* in this Financial Times article:

<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/755cc76c-4481-11e2-8fd7-00144feabdc0.html>

We hope to see you at our open sing events soon!

December 18 at 7:30 pm - *Messiah*

March 26 at 7:30 pm - *Solemn Vespers K.339*

Payson Park Church, 365 Belmont Street, Belmont

www.powersmusic.org/belmont_open_sings



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