

Newcastle University Choir PRESENTS

**Handel's**  
**MESSIAH**



NEWCASTLE  
UNIVERSITY  
CHOIR  
enlighten enrich enjoy

**SUNDAY 10 DECEMBER 2023**  
2.30PM – NEWCASTLE CITY HALL

Conductor: Dr Christopher Allan,  
Christ Church Camerata

Adult \$48 Concession \$45 Student \$25

Bookings:  
[www.civictheatrenewcastle.com.au](http://www.civictheatrenewcastle.com.au)  
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On Sunday afternoon, 10 December 2023 at 2:30 pm the Newcastle University Choir (NUC) will perform Handel's *Messiah* at the Newcastle City Hall, King Street Newcastle.

Conducted by Dr Christopher Allan, the Choir's Musical Director, the 100 voice Newcastle University Choir will be strongly supported by Christ Church Camerata Orchestra. The soloists will be Amy Moore, Soprano; Hannah Fraser, Alto; Louis Hurley, Tenor; and Andrew O'Connor, Bass.

Tickets, \$48 adult, \$45 Concession, \$25 Student, can be obtained from [www.civictheatrenewcastle.com.au](http://www.civictheatrenewcastle.com.au), by calling 49291977, or at the door.

Georg Friedrich Handel was born in Halle, Germany on 23 February 1685. His father initially prevented music studies, wanting him to be a lawyer. But Handel somehow found ways to study music theory and keyboard studies during his youth. When he was 10, the Duke of Saxon-Weissenfels recognized his talent. He convinced Handel's father that his career was in music. He moved to Hamburg in 1703 and fell in love with Opera. While there he became a highly accomplished and respected musician, especially as a harpsicord player, and composer.



*Handel Miniature portrait Age 25 Christoph Platzer* *Handel in later years*

The left portrait above suggests that Handel was a handsome young man. In 1707 he went to Rome to further his career. He wrote both Italian-style opera (i.e. *Rodrigo*) and began writing oratorio. He became known as "Il caro Sassone", the beautiful Saxon. He also learned to "borrow" music from previous works and other composers to enhance his writing.

When he was 25, he was brought to England in 1710, initially on leave of absence. Yet he remained in England for 49 years until he died in London April 6, 1759. King George I wanted him to create an opera company. He composed several of well-known operas, still often performed today. *Rinaldo* was his first

“big hit”; also *Alcina*, *Xerxes* for example. There he also encountered a different kind of composition, music written for and sung by English choirs.

*Messiah*, composed in about 4 weeks by Handel in the early 1740s, is the most loved and most performed of all Christmas/Easter Oratorios. Now older and more mature, Handel could combine all his experience and music skills. Charles Jennes provided a scriptural text, based on the King James Bible.

Handel was an excellent choral businessman. He was able to “read” the tastes and needs of his audiences. His experience on the Continent also allowed full development of orchestra and choral “colour”. Thus, at the time of its creation, *Messiah* was a unique combination of the concepts of opera, the use of the tradition of English choral music and the English love for Biblical Stories. It is the choruses that tell the core of the oratorio story, the celebration of the birth and resurrection of Christ. Thus it became popular at both Christmas and Easter. The soloists provide commentary: about the importance of the event; the passion surrounding it; and perhaps most importantly, the emotion that is so important for the birth of Christ.

The text structure of *Messiah* is in three parts. Part 1 describes the joy of the birth of Christ. Part 2 is more somber and reflective. An adult Messiah encounters prejudice in a difficult world. Part 3 focusses on the resurrection. This issue provides a few highlights and some stories from historical performances.

*Messiah* was originally performed in April 1742 in Dublin, Ireland, to an audience of about 700, in recognition of the resurrection of Christ at Easter. This was a fund-raiser for the Foundlings Hospital. Apparently, most of the *Messiah* performances during Handel’s lifetime were used to raise funds for charities.

The first London performance came a year later on 23 March 1743, at Covent Garden. However, it did not receive the same positive reaction from audiences. Reviews suggested that a theatre was not the proper venue for such and “exalted” religious-based work. This caused Handel to reduce the number for performances from the planned six to three, and to substantially revise parts of the oratorio. The newer version was much more successful. Regular performances occurred from 1745 onwards.

The most famous question is: Did King George stand for the *Hallelujah Chorus* at the end of Part 2? The answer is likely yes, but the reason(s) why are open to speculation. A blog by Dr Roy Atwood suggests the most likely reason was the musical tribute to King of Kings, a Lord greater than himself. The tradition began for the audience to stand for this wonderful chorus. There is some question whether the King was actually at the performance!

The first performance of *Messiah* in America was in New York City. The concert took place in the Burns’ Coffee House, a tavern in lower Manhattan, on January 16, 1770. Not quite the venue Handel envisioned.

The combination of Bass solo and trumpet provides a most exciting *The Trumpet Shall Sound*, when “the dead shall be raised” and “we shall all be changed”. But some scores have severely trimmed this solo, especially Mozart in his edited version of *Messiah*. Not surprisingly, this has caused some strife between the conductor and the musicians.

We hope you will enjoy our performance as much as the singers and the orchestra!!

*Howard Bridgman, Editor*  
(References: C. Padget, *A Knight at the Opera*, *Limelight*, November 2023; various Wikipedia and internet sources)