Pacific Symphony
ALEXANDER SHELLEY ARTISTIC & MUSIC DIRECTOR

HANDEL'S GLORIOUS MESSIAH

Sunday, Dec. 6, 2026 @ 3 p.m.

Jean-Sébastien Vallée, conductor
Hélène Brunet, soprano
Nicholas Burns, countertenor
Brian Giebler, tenor
Jonathan Woody, bass-baritone
Antonio Lin, boy soprano
Lori Loftus, harpsichord
Pacific Chorale—Robert Istad, Artistic Director
Pacific Symphony



Handel's Glorious Messiah is generously sponsored by:
Mark Chapin Johnson and Harason Ann Horowitz Mark Chapin Johnson Foundation

Performance at Segerstrom Center for the Arts
Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall

THE PARK CLUB. CALIFORNIA
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CLASSICAL CALIFORNIA.

Part I

Sinfonia	
Recitative:	Comfort ye my people
Air:	Ev'ry valley shall be exalted
Chorus:	And the glory of the Lord
Recitative:	Thus saith the Lord
Air:	But who may abide the day of his coming?
Chorus:	And he shall purify
Recitative:	Behold, a virgin shall conceive
Air & Chorus:	O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion
Recitative:	For behold, darkness shall cover the earth
Air:	The people that walked in darkness
Chorus:	For unto us a child is born
Pifa ("Pastoral Symphony")	
Recitative:	There were shepherds abiding in the field
Recitative:	And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them
Recitative:	And the angel said unto them
Recitative:	And suddenly there was with the angel
Chorus:	Glory to God
Air:	Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion
Recitative:	Then shall the eyes of the blind
Air:	He shall feed his flock
Chorus:	His yoke is easy

—INTERMISSION—

Part II

Chorus:	Behold the Lamb of God
Air:	He was despised
Chorus:	Surely he hath borne our griefs
Chorus:	And with his stripes we are healed
Chorus:	All we like sheep have gone astray
Recitative:	All they that see him laugh him to scorn
Chorus:	He trusted in God
Recitative:	Thy rebuke hath broken his heart
Air:	Behold, and see if there be any sorrow
Recitative:	He was cut off out of the land of the living
Air:	But thou didst not leave his soul in hell
Chorus:	Lift up your heads, O ye gates
Chorus:	The Lord gave the word
Air:	How beautiful are the feet
Chorus:	Their sound is gone out
Air:	Why do the nations so furiously rage together?
Chorus:	Let us break their bonds asunder
Recitative:	He that dwelleth in heaven
Air:	Thou shalt break them
Chorus:	Hallelujah

Part III

Air:	I know that my Redeemer liveth
Chorus:	Since by man came death
Recitative:	Behold, I tell you a mystery
Air:	The trumpet shall sound
Air:	If God be for us
Chorus:	Worthy is the Lamb that was slain

ABOUT THE GUEST CONDUCTOR

Jean-Sébastien Vallée, guest conductor



Canadian-American conductor Jean-Sébastien Vallée leads ensembles in repertoire spanning the symphonic, choral-orchestral, and vocal traditions. His work brings together an orchestral perspective with extensive experience in vocal music and is grounded in the architecture and rhetoric of the score, with particular attention to color, text, and dramatic trajectory.

Vallée is Director of Choruses of the Boston Symphony Orchestra and Conductor of the Tanglewood Festival Chorus, positions he assumed with the 2026–27 season. He is also Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the Toronto Mendelssohn Choir and Toronto Mendelssohn Singers, and Full Professor of Music and Director of Choral Studies at McGill University's Schulich School of Music.

He has collaborated with orchestras including the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Orchestre symphonique de Montréal, National Arts Centre Orchestra, and Orchestre symphonique de Québec. His 2026–27 season includes three programs with the Orchestre symphonique de Québec and conducting debuts with the Seattle Symphony and Pacific Symphony.

At the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Vallée oversees the BSO's choral activities and the artistic development of the Tanglewood Festival Chorus, collaborating with Music Director Andris Nelsons and guest conductors at Symphony Hall and Tanglewood. He is only the third conductor to lead the TFC since its founding in 1970. As Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the Toronto Mendelssohn Choir, he leads one of Canada's longstanding choral organizations and its professional chamber ensemble, the Toronto Mendelssohn Singers. His work there encompasses major choral-orchestral repertoire, contemporary music, commissions, recordings, and collaborations with orchestras and soloists.

Vallée records for ATMA Classique. His discography includes *Remember* (2024), *Distance* (2021), *Requiem – Fauré & Duruflé* (2018), *Lux* (2017), and *Lo, How a Rose* (2026).

Alongside his performing career, Vallée is an active educator and mentor to a new generation of conductors. At McGill University, he leads one of Canada's foremost university choral and conducting programs, with former students holding professional and academic appointments in Canada and abroad. A sought-after clinician and pedagogue, he has led masterclasses, workshops, and residencies throughout North America, Europe, and Asia, and serves on the Board of Directors of Chorus America.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Hélène Brunet, soprano



Hélène Brunet is hailed by the critics as "a singer of tremendous quality" with "a voice of perfect beauty" and "sincere expression." Recognized for her interpretations of the works of Bach, Handel, and Mozart, her repertoire extends from Baroque to the music of the 20th and 21st centuries.

Brunet is the recipient of a Juno Award (2022) for her first solo album *Solfeggio* (ATMA Classique) with ensemble L'Harmonie des saisons. She is the first artist to ever win for a solo album in the category Large Ensembles at the Junos. Brunet is also featured on *Las Ciudades de Oro*, a second Juno Award-winning album for ensemble L'Harmonie des saisons (2016).

In the concert repertoire, Brunet is invited to perform across North America with ensembles and orchestras, notably at Lincoln Center in New York City with the American Classical Orchestra, with American Bach Soloists in San Francisco, and the Orchestre Métropolitain under the baton of Yannick Nézet-Séguin, who says, "Hélène Brunet is the embodiment of class, refinement, and purity." She also sings with the Seattle Baroque Orchestra, Tafelmusik, ensemble Caprice, Arion Baroque Orchestra, and I Musici de Montréal.

In opera, Brunet was recently featured in the world premiere of the opera *Sleeping Rough* by Roddy Ellias and Sandra Nicholls at the Music and Beyond festival in Ottawa, Canada. Brunet was a prize winner at the Lyndon Woodside Oratorio-Solo Competition at Carnegie Hall. She studies with voice teacher Neil Semer in New York.

Nicholas Burns, countertenor



Possessing "a thrilling voice" (*Olyrix*), Canadian countertenor Nicholas Burns is "a major talent on the rise" (*Ludwig Van Toronto*). A multi-award winner of Carnegie Hall's New York Oratorio Society Competition, Les Jeunes Ambassadeurs Lyriques, the Vancouver International Music Competition, and Edmonton Opera's Rumbold Vocal Prize, Burns has performed with leading ensembles on both sides of the Atlantic, including Les Arts Florissants, L'Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal, Vancouver Opera, and the Toronto Symphony Orchestra.

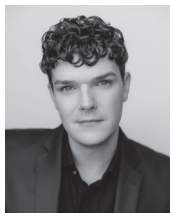
Recent and upcoming performances include engagements with Opera Sofia, Ensemble Caprice, the Montréal Bach Festival, and returning appearances with Arion Baroque Orchestra, American Bach Soloists, L'Harmonie des saisons, and Tafelmusik.

On the operatic stage, Burns delivers commanding performances across centuries of repertoire. He has portrayed Cesare in Handel's *Giulio Cesare*, Bertarido in *Rodelinda*, Polinesso in *Ariodante*, and Lichas in *Hercules*. *The Chronicle Journal* described his *Messiah* performance as "a rare and beautiful experience," praising his "pure vocal tones [that] evoked all the baroque splendor of Handel's composition."

Equally adept with contemporary works, he premiered the opera *L'Orangeraie* by French composer Zad Moultaka, a "moving" rendition that "dominated the stage" (*La Presse+*).

Burns serves as Engagement and Musicology Curator at Vancouver Opera, where he hosts pre-show educational talks. He has also been invited for multiple public speaking engagements at the Vancouver Public Library. Beyond his vocal prowess, Burns is an accomplished bagpiper, having won the World Pipe Band Championships in 2012.

Brian Giebler, tenor



GRAMMY®-nominated tenor Brian Giebler has been praised for his "lovely tone and deep expressivity" (*The New York Times*) and "shine and clarity" (*Opera News*). His debut solo album, a lad's love, earned a GRAMMY nomination for Best Classical Solo Vocal Album and critical acclaim from *Gramophone, Opera News*, and *San Francisco Classical Voice*.

An acclaimed interpreter of the Roasted Swan in Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana*, Giebler has performed the work with the Austin, Boise, Colorado, Knoxville, Milwaukee, Vermont, and Virginia symphony orchestras. His performances of Handel's *Messiah* include appearances with Music of the Baroque, American Bach Soloists, the Seoul Metropolitan Chorus, Trinity Wall Street, and the National Philharmonic.

A specialist in Baroque and Classical repertoire, Giebler has portrayed Apollo in Handel's *Semele* with The English Concert under Harry Bicket, Septimius in Handel's *Theodora* with Ars Lyrica Houston, Aeneas in Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* with Atlanta Baroque Orchestra, and Arnalta in Monteverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea* with Boston Baroque. His commitment to contemporary music includes performances in Craig Hella Johnson's *Considering Matthew Shepard*, Wachner's *REV 23*, and Wuorinen's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories.*

Antonio Lin, boy soprano



Fourteen-year-old vocalist Antonio Lin is honored to perform with Pacific Symphony and the Pacific Chorale. He starred in the title role of Genesis Opera Theatre's 2025 production of *Amahl and the Night Visitors* and appeared as a leading vocalist in *The Legend*s at Segerstrom Hall in 2024 and 2025. In 2024, he joined soprano Sarah Brightman as a guest duet partner for three concerts on her *A Christmas Symphony* tour, including a performance at the Dolby Theatre. He is also featured on "All Is Well" from GENTRI's 2025 album, *Emmanuel*.

Lin performed at Carnegie Hall after winning first place in the junior opera aria category of the American Protégé International Vocal Competition. Other honors include first prize in the 2025 Salzburg International Music Competition's Junior Virtuoso division; first place in the SoCal Philharmonic's 2025 Young Artists Concerto Competition, Prodigy Division; and first place in both classical and musical theater at the 2024 VO-CAL competition. He has also received top prizes in NATS competitions. Lin studies voice with Kathleen Martin, John Henri, Vera Calábria, and William Vendice, and piano with Chizuko Asada. He is a leading soloist with The All-American Boys Chorus, directed by Wesley Martin. Outside music, he enjoys tennis, board games, and skiing.

Jonathan Woody, bass-baritone



Bass-baritone and composer Jonathan Woody performs across North America and is praised by *The Washington Post* for singing "with resonance and clarity." He appears regularly with historically informed ensembles, including Boston Early Music Festival, Apollo's Fire, Pacific MusicWorks, Bach Collegium San Diego, Trinity Baroque Orchestra, and New York Baroque Incorporated. As a member of the GRAMMY®-nominated Choir of Trinity Wall Street, he has been recognized by *The New York Times* for his "charismatic" and "riveting" solos.

Woody's compositions draw on 17th- and 18th-century musical traditions while engaging with contemporary minimalism and socially conscious themes. Since 2020, he has received commissions from Apollo's Fire, the Choir of Trinity Wall Street, Chanticleer, and the Handel and Haydn Society.

An advocate for contemporary opera, he has participated in premieres of Ted Hearne's *The Source*, Ellen Reid's Pulitzer Prize-winning *p r i s m*, Missy Mazzoli's *Breaking the Waves*, and Du Yun's Pulitzer Prize-winning *Angel's Bone*. Committed to racial equity in the performing arts, Woody serves on Early Music America's Task Force for Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access. He holds degrees from McGill University and the University of Maryland, College Park, and lives in Brooklyn, New York, on traditional Lenape lands.

Lori Loftus, harpsichord



Lori Loftus is founding director of the Southern California Children's Chorus, guiding a faculty serving singers ages to 18 across six choral levels. Under her leadership, the chorus has earned three Emmy Awards for its choral music education and performed at prestigious venues, including Carnegie Hall and the Sydney Opera House.

A frequent guest keyboardist with Pacific Symphony since 1976, Loftus regularly performs on the organ at Segerstrom Hall and plays harpsichord for annual performances of Handel's Messiah with Pacific Symphony and the Pacific Chorale. California State University, Fullerton, recognized her with its Outstanding Alumni Award for Excellence in Choral Music in 2007 and the School of Music's Titan of Music Award in 2022. Her decades of collaboration with Southern California musicians reflect a lifelong commitment to performance and music education.

Beyond the stage, Loftus enjoys tournament golf, raising monarch butterflies, and traveling. She and her husband, John, have six grandchildren and two Siamese cats.

Scan for Digital Program Book and Full Bios

ABOUT PACIFIC CHORALE

PACIFIC CHORALE, founded in 1968, is the GRAMMY® Award-winning resident choir at Segerstrom Center for the Arts. Led by Artistic Director Robert Istad, the ensemble has premiered more than 40 works, including compositions by John Adams, Jake Heggie, Morten Lauridsen, and Eric Whitacre. Its partnership with Pacific Symphony includes a 2018 Carnegie Hall debut. With the Los Angeles Philharmonic, it earned the 2022 Grammy Award for Best Choral Performance for Mahler's Symphony No. 8, conducted by Gustavo Dudamel. The choir has toured 19 countries, most recently visiting Austria, Germany, and the United Kingdom in 2023. Its recordings, digital performances and educational programs bring choral music to audiences of all ages.

Robert Istad, artistic director

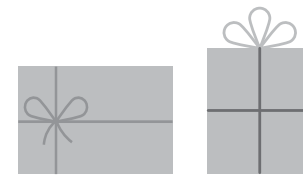


ROBERT ISTAD has served as Pacific Chorale's artistic director since 2017. The Grammy Award-winning conductor led the choir's 2023 European tour and prepared it for the Los Angeles Philharmonic's Grammy-winning recording of Mahler's Symphony No. 8. He also conducted *All Things Common: The Music of Tarik O'Regan*. His collaborations include Pacific Symphony, Long Beach Symphony, and Bath Philharmonia. Istad is professor of music and director of choral studies at California State University, Fullerton, where he was named 2016 Outstanding Professor of the Year. He serves on Chorus America's executive board and as dean of its Conducting Academy.

Kibsaim Escárcega, assistant conductor & chorusmaster



KIBSAIM ESCÁRCEGA is assistant conductor of Pacific Chorale and an active Southern California conductor, educator and singer. He earned degrees in vocal performance and choral conducting from UC Irvine and Cal State Fullerton, where he held conducting appointments with choral and opera ensembles. He has served as chorusmaster for Lyric Opera of Orange County and prepared choirs for performances at Segerstrom Concert Hall and the Hollywood Bowl. His mentors include Seth Houston, Stephen Tucker, Robert Istad, and Kimo Furumoto.



Robert Istad / Artistic Director and Conductor
Phillip N. and Mary A. Lyons Artistic Director Chair
Kibsaim Escárcega / Assistant Conductor
Ron Rudderow Legacy Chair

Rhett M. Del Campo / President & CEO
Alex Nelson / VP, Artistic Production & Operations

SOPRANO
Rebecca Hasquet
Section Leader
Andria Nuñez Cabrera
Ariana Celeste
Chelsea Chaves
Jenna Hansen
Erika Jackson 10
Saousan Jarjour
Hannah Kim 10
Kathryn Lillich
Anne McClintic 10
Amber Napoli
Maria Cristina Navarro
Melanie Pedro
Libby Quam
Rose Taylor
Victoria Wu

ALTO
Jane Hyun-Jung Shim
Section Leader
Hannah Black
Emily Border
Denean R. Dyson
Brandon Harris
Meadow Jones
Stacey Y. Kikkawa
Bekka Knauer
Kathleen Moriarty
Kathleen Preston
Elizabeth Provencio
Kaleigh Sanchez
Stephanie Shepson
Rachel Steinke
Abby Tyree
Marijke van Niekerk

TENOR
Nicholas Preston 25
Section Leader
Roger W. Johnson Memorial Chair
Jephte Acosta
Daniel Coy Babcock
Chris Buttars
Abraham Cervantes
Saunder Choi
David Evered
Alan Garcia
Johnny G. Gonzales
Steven M. Hoffman
Craig S. Kistler
Jeremy Lee
Lance Padilla
Sammy Salvador
Ron Gray Legacy Chair
Christiaan Westerkamp
Yngwie Slassh Zamarippa

BASS
Ryan Thomas Antal
Section Leader,
Ron Gray Legacy Chair
Michael Fagerstedt
Jonathan Goodwin
Randall Gremillion
Brian Hamer
Mark Hamilton 15
Jared Hughes
Matthew Kellaway
Jonathan Krauss
Elliot Z. Levine
Kenneth Moore
Ryan Morris
Aaron Murphy
Zachary T Nelson
Malek Sammour
Ian Schipper

Celebrating milestone years with Pacific Chorale this season.

10 15 20 25 30 35 40 45

LIBRETTO
The Words selected from Holy Scripture by Charles Jennens

PART I

Sinfonia

Recitative (Tenor)
Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God; speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplish'd, that her iniquity is pardon'd. 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)

Aria (Tenor)
Ev'ry valley shall be exalted, and ev'ry 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)

Recitative (Bass-Baritone)
Thus saith the Lord, the Lord of Hosts; Yet once, a little while, and I will shake the heav'ns 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; ev'n the messenger of the Covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, He shall come, saith the Lord of Hosts.

(Malachi 3:1)

Aria (Countertenor)
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 (Countertenor)
Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his
name Emmanuel, "God with us."

(Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23)

Aria (Countertenor) 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! O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion, arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.

(Isaiah 40:9; Isaiah 60:1)

Recitative (Bass-Baritone)
For, behold, the 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)

Aria (Bass-Baritone)
The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light, and 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* (Soprano)**
There were shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

(Luke 2:8)

Recitative (Soprano)
But 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: 9)

Recitative (Soprano)
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 Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."

(Luke 2:10–11)

Recitative (Soprano)
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, goodwill towards men.

(Luke 2:14)

Aria (Soprano)
Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion, shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, thy King cometh unto thee: He is the righteous Saviour, and He shall speak peace unto the heathen. Rejoice greatly ... da capo.

(Zechariah 9:9-10)

Recitative (Countertenor)
Then shall the eyes of the blind be open'd, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing.

(Isaiah 35:5-6)

Duet (Soprano and Countertenor)
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. Come unto Him all ye that labour, come unto Him that 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.

(Isaiah 40:11; Matthew 11:28-29)

Chorus
His yoke is easy, and His burthen is light.

(Matthew 11:30)

PART II

Chorus
Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world.
(John 1:29)

Aria (Countertenor)
He was despised, 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 His hair: He hid not His face from shame and spitting.
He was despised . . . da capo
(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 ev'ry one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.
(Isaiah 53:6)

Recitative (Tenor)
All they that see Him, laugh Him to scorn; they shoot out their lips, and shake their Heads, saying:
(Psalm 22:7)

Chorus
He trusted in God that He would deliver Him, let Him deliver Him, if He delight in Him.
(Psalm 22:8)

Recitative (Tenor)
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.
(Psalm 69:20)

Aria (Tenor)
Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto His sorrow!
(Lamentations 1:12)

Recitative (Tenor)
He was cut off out of the land of the living; for the transgressions of Thy people was He stricken
(Isaiah 53:8)

Aria (Tenor)
But Thou didst not leave His soul in hell, nor didst Thou suffer Thy Holy One to see corruption.
(Psalm 16:10)

Chorus
Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in. Who is this 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. Who is this King of Glory? The Lord of Hosts, He is the King of Glory.
(Psalm 24:7-10)

Aria (Soprano)
How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things.
(Romans 10:15)

Aria (Bass-Baritone)
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.
(Psalm 2: 1-2)

Chorus
Let us break their bonds asunder, and cast away their yokes from us.
(Psalm 2: 3)

Recitative (Tenor)
He that dwelleth in heaven shall laugh them to scorn, the Lord shall have them in derision.
(Psalm 2:4)

Aria (Tenor)
Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.
(Psalm 2: 9)

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!
(Revelation 19:6; 11:15; 19:16)

PART III

Aria (Soprano)
I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the Earth. And tho' 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.
(Job 19:25-26; 1 Corinthians 15:20)

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.
(1 Corinthians 15:21-22)

Recitative (Bass-Baritone)
Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be chang'd, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.
(1 Corinthians 15:51-52)

Aria (Bass-Baritone)
The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be rais'd incorruptible, and we shall be chang'd. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. The trumpet . . . da capo
(1 Corinthians 15:52-53)

Aria (Soprano)
If God be for us, who can be against us? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is at the right hand of God, who maketh intercession for us.
(Romans 8:31-34)

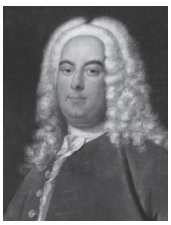
Chorus
Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, and hath redeemed us to God by His blood, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. Blessing and honour, glory and pow'r be unto Him that sitteth upon the Throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever. Amen
(Revelation 5:12-14)

PROGRAM NOTES

George Frideric Handel

Born: Feb. 23, 1685 in Halle, Germany
Died: Apr. 14, 1759 in London, England

Messiah, HWV 56



Composed: Sept. 14, 1741
Premiered: Apr. 13, 1742 in Dublin, Ireland.
Most recent Pacific Symphony performance: Dec. 7, 2025 with Robert Istad conducting.
Instrumentation: Two oboes, two bassoons, two trumpets, timpani, continuo, and strings, with soprano, countertenor, tenor, bass soloists, and chorus.
Approximate duration: 105 minutes

Keynoted by joyful music that's seemingly everywhere this time of year, holiday cheer comes along every year, just when we need it most. But the beauty of Handel's oratorio *Messiah* does more than just warm our hearts; it stirs our soul. Handel composed it in a fever of creativity so intense that he felt the heavens opened to him. Almost three centuries later, we can thank heavens that they did.

The sound and style of Christmas in America continue to be shaped by two giants of English arts and letters: George Frideric Handel, whose 1741 masterpiece *Messiah* has become the best-known oratorio in the world, and Charles Dickens, whose short novel *A Christmas Carol* was published in 1843, establishing a benchmark for the generosity and goodwill we now associate with Christmas. Together, these influences have made annual performances of *Messiah*—which was not originally composed for Christmas—an indispensable yuletide tradition.

Messiah is inexhaustible not only in its outpouring of inspired melody and dramatic effects, but also in the commentary surrounding it. As winter closes in and our appreciation of this miraculous oratorio is renewed, the observations from past seasons—like the music itself—sound fresh. Papa Haydn, always generous in praising the merits of other composers, called Handel "der Meister von uns allen," "the master of us all" at a performance of *Messiah*. But Beethoven, who was far more grudging with his approval, used almost the same words—"der unerreichte Meister aller Meisters," "the unequalled master of all masters," to describe the composer of *Messiah*. Always concerned with dramatic intensity and profound ideas, Beethoven added "Go and learn from him how to achieve vast effects with simple means." *Messiah* is certainly rich with them, along with beautiful melodies and the insistent rhythms that are characteristic of the Baroque era, easy to love and hard to forget. "What the English like is something that they can beat time to, something that hits them straight on the drum of the ear," writes Handel biographer Richard Alexander Streatfeild, citing Anton Schmid, the 20th-century Austrian intellectual and resistance fighter against the Nazis. Today *Messiah* still bangs us straight on the drum of the ear, inspiring reinterpretations in swing, rap and jazz styles.

Master of both sacred and secular music, Handel was born in 1685, at the height of the Baroque era. He was a native of Germany, but his early travels included Italy, where he assimilated the Italian styles of operatic composition before settling in England. Successful in all vocal and instrumental music forms, he was the English court's go-to composer for the nation's most important ceremonial music. His gifts seem to converge in *Messiah*, with its endlessly expressive melodies and towering drama so perfectly suited to expressing the story and the glory of Christ's birth.

Although *Messiah* was originally composed for performance during Lent, it has been universally adopted as a musical high point of the Advent season. For Handel himself and for millions of listeners it is not only a thrilling entertainment but also a deep expression of religious faith that sounds new no matter how many times we have heard it. Handel famously described the process of composing the "Hallelujah" chorus as the heavens opening to him. Yet *Messiah* was also a commercial imperative for him. He composed it at a time when he was in need of a major success: He had enjoyed a hugely successful run writing and producing his own operas, but the public taste for his operas was fading. Having already written operas on sacred themes, he turned to the unstaged oratorio form. *Messiah* is the foremost example of what became known as the English oratorio, which combines religious texts with elements of intense drama, sometimes in ways hard to distinguish from opera. Most of them combine biblical and non-biblical texts, though *Messiah* is drawn entirely from the Bible.

Composition of *Messiah* was completed within 24 days, a breakneck pace for so expansive a work. The text was provided by Charles Jennens, drawn mainly from the biblical books of Isaiah and the gospel of St. Matthew—a selection that, according to some sources, reflected Jennens' and possibly even Handel's anti-establishment political leanings. After all, who but a radical egalitarian would so potently emphasize Isaiah's prophecy that "every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill made low?" Still, a message of straightforward religious inspiration was overriding for Handel and remains so for his audiences. There are many traditional accounts of seemingly divine inspiration as he worked. In one, his assistant walked into the room where he was composing after shouting to him for minutes on end with no response. He supposedly found Handel in tears, pen in hand, and asked what was wrong. "I thought I saw the face of God," Handel said.

The immediate popularity of Handel's *Messiah* made it an instant tradition in England and elsewhere, and annual performances gradually moved from Eastertide to the Christmas season. By 1784, *Messiah* performances at events such as the Handel Centenary Commemoration were commonplace, often drawing together huge choral and orchestral forces. As an impresario, Handel was accustomed to tailoring his works for specific performers and production circumstances, and various editions of *Messiah* existed even within his lifetime. He also expected soloists to interpolate vocal ornamentations as appropriate, a practice that reappeared during the bel canto revival that began during the 1960s.

The sheer theatricality of *Messiah* contributed greatly to its success, and still does. Though not staged, it is religion made theater. Its drama and beauty flow first from its beautiful melodies, which inspire us while capturing the revelatory emotions described in the text. But they also gain extraordinary intensity through the Baroque compositional technique of "word painting," in which the flow of notes in the music actually seems to replicate a shape or contour that the notes describe. One frequently cited example of word painting occurs early in Part I, in the tenor aria "Every valley shall be exalted." On the word "mountain," the tenor's voice rises, creating a literal peak of sound; then it drops by an octave, showing how the mountain is made low. *Messiah* teems with effects like these.

For all of its vividness, Handel's mastery of word painting accounts for just part of the dramatic impact of *Messiah*. It combines with his gift for melody and a sympathetic understanding of psychology that appeals to us in a way that is less literal, but more deeply human. When we hear the soprano soloist singing "Come unto Him, all ye that…are heavy laden," who can fail to take comfort at the tenderness of her vocal line? Equally intense are the passages of joyful anticipation and of triumph, as in the prophecy expressed in "For unto Us" and in the glorious "Hallelujah" chorus, which so overwhelmed Handel's contemporary audiences that, we are told, they spontaneously rose to their feet in awe—a tradition that persists to this day in many parts of the world.

Today, there is no definitive performing edition or single "correct" approach to performing *Messiah*, and every conductor who leads it must make critical decisions to do so. But those decisions are informed by the living traditions that we all enjoy as listeners, and by the work of Handel scholars and performers. For example, the soprano aria "Rejoice greatly" exists in both 4/4 and 6/8 tempos, each with its own unique appeal; the 4/4 version is graceful and dignified, while the 6/8 version dances with joy.

Such decisions are often the result of collaboration between soloist and conductor. Soprano Joan Sutherland and her husband, the conductor Richard Bonynge, collected Handel manuscripts and researched principles of vocal ornamentation in Handel operas and oratorios including *Messiah*, which she recorded. In fact, it was her performance in another Handel oratorio—as the Israelite Woman in Samson—that cued alert Covent Garden listeners to her extraordinary talent back in the late 1950s. But the association between diva soprano and the soprano solo role in *Messiah* extends more than a century earlier, back to the legendary Jenny Lind, who sang *Messiah* and barnstormed the U.S. as a Barnum-sponsored headliner in the 1840s. On one of her transatlantic crossings, the Swedish Nightingale asked her ship's captain to wake her before dawn, without specifying a reason for her request. At the appointed hour, she stood with him at the ship's railing as the sun rose over the waters and sang "I Know My Redeemer Liveth."

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