

ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS CHORAL SOCIETY

89th SEASON

ASSEMBLY HALL, TUNBRIDGE WELLS

SUNDAY 29th NOVEMBER 1992

3.00 p.m.

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# MESSIAH

## HANDEL

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Jennifer Akhurst	<i>Soprano</i>
Margareta Hillerud	<i>Mezzo Soprano</i>
Jeffery Stewart	<i>Tenor</i>
Nathan Berg	<i>Bass</i>

*Harpsichord played by*  
Ruth Rolt

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CONDUCTOR  
DEREK WATMOUGH, MBE

*Orchestra led by* RITA JAMES

*Programme 50p*

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## MESSIAH *Handel*

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**H**andel's career was at a miserably low ebb in the winter of 1740-41. Two Italian operas had failed badly: *Imeneo* was given for only two performances in November, and *Deidama* (the last he ever wrote) only three in January; and in the year before - 1739 - two of his greatest oratorios, *Saul* and *Israel in Egypt*, had been no better received. London had grown tired of Handel and it was believed, Sir Newman Flower tells us, that "he was finished and would be seen no more."

Rescue came by two events that can surely be described as providential. First, in August, there landed on Handel's desk the text of an oratorio called *Messiah*, strikingly summarised by its compiler, Charles Jennens:

*Great is the mystery of Godliness: God was manifested in the Flesh, justified by the Spirit, seen of Angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the World, received up in glory. In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*

"The greatest story ever told" obviously fired Handel's imagination. Working with even more than his usual astonishing speed, he completed the score in 24 days (adapting some, but not really very much, music from his earlier works). There was

no question of meeting a deadline. The score was put away in a drawer for seven weeks while the composer got to work on another oratorio (*Samson*). Then in November occurred the second 'providential' event: an invitation from the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland to come to Dublin and give concerts in aid of local charities.

Handel left for Ireland almost immediately. If London no longer wanted him, Dublin obviously did; everybody was keen to welcome "the celebrated Dr. Handell" (as he was described in a news sheet) and to hear his music. The entire visit was a triumph, culminating in the first performance of *Messiah* in April (1742). "Words are wanting," Faulkner's Journal reported, "to express the exquisite Delight it afforded to the admiring crowded Audience." The jaded London audience, however, felt no such delight - Handel tried the work out there in March 1743 - and about ten years elapsed before *Messiah* 'caught on' and began to occupy the position it has held ever since as the best known and most loved piece of choral music in the English-speaking world.

Part 1 immediately introduces the strong element of 'salvation history' which is characteristic of the work: 'prophetic' passages of the Old Testament understood as pointing to the revelation of God in

Christ. Israel's iniquity is pardoned (the tenor soloist sings) and the crooked made straight; and the first chorus tells how "the glory of the Lord shall be revealed." After a darker section stressing purification and penance – who, the contralto soloist asks, shall be found "worthy to stand when He appeareth?" – the story moves on to prophecies of the Nativity: the people who walk in gross darkness shall see a great light; "for unto us a Child is born," the manner of his birth being described by the shepherds who were vouchsafed a vision of the Heavenly Host. When the daughters of Zion and Jerusalem have been enjoined to "Rejoice greatly" the contralto and then the soprano soloists meditate on the goodness of a God who shall feed His flock like a shepherd and give rest to the weary; and the first part ends with the appropriately lightweight chorus "His yoke is easy".

Part II introduces a sharply contrasting mood of grief and desolation with settings of the great 'Suffering Servant' texts in Isaiah 53. Two impressive choruses, in G minor and then F minor, are linked by the sublime contralto aria "He was despised" – this in the major mode, as Handel's most deeply felt utterances often are. Two more choruses on the theme of Atonement – "And with His stripes" and "All we like sheep" – are followed after a short recitative by the brutally mocking "He

trusted in God"; after which the depth of despair seems to be reached with the wonderfully expressive tenor recitative "Thy rebuke hath broken His heart" and the aria "Behold and see": was ever any sorrow "like unto His sorrow"?

The gloom lifts as an aria and a jubilant 5 part chorus ("Lift up your heads") seem to herald the Resurrection and the Ascension; and a succession of brilliant arias and choruses celebrate the spread of the Gospel and the coming of the Kingdom. The heathen may furiously rage against the Lord and His anointed, but their bonds are broken asunder and their yokes cast off by the power of the "King of Kings and Lord of Lords" extolled in the famous Hallelujah chorus which ends this part of the oratorio.

Part III, although much shorter, is most certainly no anti-climax. The serenely beautiful soprano aria "I know that my Redeemer liveth" leads naturally into the hushed, awe-filled setting for unaccompanied choir of the Pauline texts which tell how "in Adam all die" but are made alive in Christ. Then the magnificent bass aria "The trumpet shall sound" is followed immediately (in this performance) by the massive final chorus "Worthy is the Lamb", culminating in what has been called "an amazing example of Handel's contrapuntal skill": the extended fugue on "Amen".

K.M.

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# MESSIAH

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## PART ONE

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|--------|--|-----------------------|
| 1      | Overture                                     |                       |
| 2      | Comfort ye my people                         | <i>Recit.</i>         |
| 3      | Ev'ry valley shall be exalted                | <i>Air</i>            |
| 4      | And the glory of the Lord                    | <i>Chorus</i>         |
| 5      | Thus saith the Lord                          | <i>Recit.</i>         |
| 6      | But who may abide the day of his coming?     | <i>Air</i>            |
| 7      | And he shall purify                          | <i>Chorus</i>         |
| 8      | Behold a virgin shall conceive               | <i>Recit.</i>         |
| 9      | O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion     | <i>Air and Chorus</i> |
| 10     | For behold, darkness shall cover the earth   | <i>Recit.</i>         |
| 11     | The people that walked in darkness           | <i>Air</i>            |
| 12     | For unto us a child is born                  | <i>Chorus</i>         |
| 13     | Pastoral Symphony                            |                       |
| 14 (a) | There were shepherds abiding in the field    | <i>Recit.</i>         |
| (b)    | And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them | <i>Recit.</i>         |
| 15     | And the angel said to them                   | <i>Recit.</i>         |
| 16     | And suddenly there was with the angel        | <i>Recit.</i>         |
| 17     | Glory to God                                 | <i>Chorus</i>         |
| 18     | Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion          | <i>Air</i>            |
| 19     | Then shall the eyes of the blind             | <i>Recit.</i>         |
| 20     | He shall feed his flock                      | <i>Air</i>            |
| 21     | His yoke is easy and his burthen is light.   | <i>Chorus</i>         |

## PART TWO

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|----|--|---------------|
| 22 | Behold the Lamb of God                   | <i>Chorus</i> |
| 23 | He was despised                          | <i>Air</i>    |
| 24 | Surely he hath borne our griefs          | <i>Chorus</i> |
| 25 | And with his stripes we are healed       | <i>Chorus</i> |
| 26 | All we like sheep have gone astray       | <i>Chorus</i> |
| 27 | All they that see him laugh him to scorn | <i>Recit.</i> |
| 28 | He trusted in God                        | <i>Chorus</i> |

29	Thy rebuke hath broken his heart	<i>Recit.</i>
30	Behold, and see if there be any sorrow	<i>Air</i>
31	He was cut off out of the land of the living	<i>Recit.</i>
32	But thou didst not leave his soul in hell	<i>Air</i>
33	Lift up your heads, O ye gates	<i>Chorus</i>
34	Thou art gone up on high	<i>Air</i>
35	How beautiful are the feet	<i>Air</i>
36	Why do the nations so furiously rage together?	<i>Air</i>
37	Let us break their bonds asunder	<i>Chorus</i>
38	He that dwelleth in heaven	<i>Recit.</i>
39	Thou shalt break them	<i>Air</i>
40	Hallelujah	<i>Chorus</i>

### PART THREE

41	I know that my redeemer liveth	<i>Air</i>
42	Since by man came death	<i>Chorus</i>
43	Behold, I tell you a mystery	<i>Recit.</i>
44	The trumpet shall sound	<i>Air</i>
45	Worthy is the Lamb that was slain	<i>Chorus</i>

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## THE SOLOISTS

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### JENNIFER AKHURST

Jennifer is currently a student on the Opera course at the Guildhall school of Music and Drama where she is studying with Bernard Dickerson for which she has been awarded a Wolfson Scholarship.

Operatic repertoire includes Rameau's *Hippolyte et Aricie* with William Christie, the lady in waiting *Gloriana*, Belinda *Dido and Anaas* with Morley Opera, Governess in scenes from *The Turn of the Screw* at GSMD and Donna Elvira in *Don Giovanni* for British Youth Opera at Saddler's Wells.

Oratorio repertoire includes Handel's *Messiah*, Haydn's *Creation*, Bach's *St. Matthew* and *St. John's Passions*, the Monteverdi *Vespers* and Mendelssohn's *Elijah*.

### MARGARETA HILLERUD

Margareta was born in Sweden. She studied at the Stockholm School of Music from 1974-83 and took a degree in Musicology at Stockholm University. Before moving to London she did a two year opera course at Opera Studio 67.

As a member of the Youth Chorus at

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## THE SOLOISTS cont...

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the Royal Opera in Stockholm, Margareta has participated in a number of productions and has toured to Wiesbaden, Bergen and Saronlinna.

In 1989 Margareta sang Zerlina in Don Juan Freestyle at the South Theatre, Stockholm. In the summer seasons of 1989 and 1991 she was a member of the chorus at Drottningholm Court Theatre. In the Summer of 1990 she sang Fidalma in Cimaosas' *Il matrimonio segreto* at the Teatro Signorelli in Coltone, Italy.

### JEFFERY STEWART

Jeffery Stewart was born in Surrey in April 1967 and is presently studying under William McAlpine, on the Opera Course at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama.

He made his professional operatic debut as Gaston in Verdi's *La Traviata* at the Cambridge Arts Theatre in February 1990. He has appeared in several operas at the Guildhall and recently appeared as Don Narciso in Rossini's *Il Turco in Italia* for Opera Italiana. Future rôles include Gonzalve in Ravel's *L'Heure Espagnole*, also at the Guildhall.

Jeffery has a wide repertoire of oratorio. These include a tour of France singing the *Creation* (Haydn) and a tour of Belgium in *Elijah* (Mendelssohn).

Much of Jeffery's stage experience has come through musicals. His leads include Tony in *West Side Story*, Gaylord Ravenal in *Showboat* and Joseph in *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat*.

Jeffery has appeared in many cabarets

and concerts throughout England and Wales and also sings regularly with the close harmony quintet – The Darktown Strutters.

### NATHAN BERG

Born in Saskatchewan, Canada, Nathan Berg's vocal studies have taken him to the University of Western Ontario, the Aspen Opera Theatre Centre, Colorado, the Maitrise National de Versailles, France, the Banff School of Fine Arts and finally to the Guildhall School of Music and Drama where he currently studies Opera.

Among his work in the Guildhall, Nathan has performed Theseus in Rameau's *Hippolyte et Aricie*, Peter Quince in Britten's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Mr. Page in Nicolai's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. With British Youth Opera he has performed Guglielmo in Mozart's *Così fan Tutti*.

At Guildhall Nathan has won the Schubert and John Ireland competitions and in recent international competition was placed third in the Peter Pears competition, second in the Kathleen Ferrier competition and won the overseas section of the Royal Overseas League competition. He often works with William Christie and Les Arts Florissants and amongst other plans with them is looking forward to a tour and a recording of Handel's *Messiah* in 1993. With John Lubbock he has recently been soloist in Brahms' and Verdi's requiems and a series of Haydn masses.

Nathan studies with Vera Rosza.

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# THE ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS CHORAL SOCIETY

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Honorary Life President:	John H. Johnson
Chairman:	Helen MacNab
Musical Director and Principal Conductor:	Derek Watmough
Honorary Life Member:	Anthony Smith-Masters

## PATRONS

Mr. I. Audsley

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M. Wynne

W. Yates

We are most grateful for the support of Patrons and Vice Patrons, and new ones are always welcome. Please ring or write to the General Secretary, Mr L.A. Lee, 233 Greggs Wood Road, Tunbridge Wells (Tunbridge Wells 521937).

The choir rehearses on Monday evenings from September to April. New members are always welcome. There is a simple and private audition. Please contact the Membership Secretary Miss M Standen - 38 Sandhurst Avenue, Pembury, Kent TN2 4JZ, Tel Pembury 2048 - we shall be pleased to have you join us.

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# FUTURE CONCERTS

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## ASSEMBLY HALL

3.00pm

- December 6 1992                      Royal Tunbridge Wells Symphony Orchestra
- February 7 1993                     Royal Tunbridge Wells Symphony Orchestra
- March 3 1993                         Royal Tunbridge Wells Symphony Orchestra
- March 21 1993                        Royal Tunbridge Wells Choral Society – “Hiawatha”

## TRINITY ARTS CENTRE

3.00pm

*Green Room Club*

- January 17 1993    Nigel Hall – Piano
- February 21st 1993                                        Jozic Hoc – Baritone & Rebecca Hoat – Piano
- March 28 1993    Amabile Ensemble



**SOUTH-EAST ARTS**

The Royal Tunbridge Wells Choral Society acknowledges, with thanks,  
financial assistance from the South East Arts Association