

Matthew Halls, conductor
Karina Gauvin, soprano
Krisztina Szabó, mezzo-soprano
Nicholas Phan, tenor
William Berger, baritone
St. Louis Symphony Chorus
Amy Kaiser, director

Friday, December 7, 2018 at 8:00PM
Saturday, December 8, 2018 at 8:00PM
Sunday, December 9, 2018 at 3:00PM

HANDEL
(1685-1759)

Messiah (1830-1831)
PART I

Symphony
Comfort ye, comfort ye my people
Ev'ry valley shall be exalted
And the glory, the glory of the Lord
Thus saith the Lord, the Lord of Hosts
But who may abide the day of His coming
And He shall purify
Behold, a virgin shall conceive
O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion
For behold, darkness shall cover the earth
The people that walked in darkness
For unto us a Child is born
Pifa
There were shepherds abiding in the field
And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them
And the angel said unto them
And suddenly there was with the angel
Glory to God in the highest
Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion
Then shall the eyes of the blind be open'd
He shall feed His flock like a shepherd
His yoke is easy, His burthen is light

INTERMISSION

PART II

Behold the Lamb of God
He was despised
Surely, He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows
And with His stripes we are healed
All we like sheep have gone astray
All they that see Him, laugh Him to scorn
He trusted in God
Thy rebuke hath broken His heart
Behold, and see if there be any sorrow
He was cut off out of the land of the living
But Thou didst not leave His soul in hell
The Lord gave the word
How beautiful are the feet of Him/them
Why do the nations so furiously rage together
Let us break their bonds asunder
He that dwelleth in heaven
Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron
Hallelujah

PART III

I know that my Redeemer liveth
Since by man came death
Behold, I tell you a mystery
The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be rais'd
If God be for us who can be against
Worthy is the Lamb that was slain

Karina Gauvin, soprano
Krisztina Szabó, mezzo-soprano
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Karina Gauvin is the **Sanford N. and Priscilla R. McDonnell Guest Artist**.

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The concert of Saturday, December 8, is underwritten in part by a generous gift from **Mr. and Mrs. David L. Steward**.

The concert of Sunday, December 9, is underwritten in part by a generous gift from **Mr. and Mrs. C. Robert Farwell**.

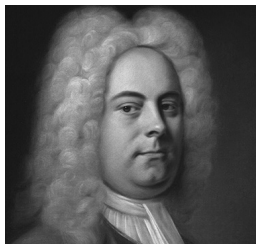
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PROGRAM NOTES

BY TIM MUNRO



GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL

Born March 5, 1685, Magdeburg, Germany

Died April 14, 1759, London, England

A leap into the unknown

Handel was at a crossroads. He was the most fashionable composer of London's most fashionable genre, Italian opera. He was lauded, feted, taken into the homes of the rich and famous.

But, thirty years after Handel had arrived in London, the city's opera madness was fading. This situation was perilous for Handel, a freelance composer. He had bills to pay, and opera was no longer paying them.

Then, a spark. Around this time, Handel dusted off two works in a genre unknown in London. These "oratorios" looked and sounded like operas, but told religious stories. He performed them in London to enthusiastic acclaim. Perhaps, thought Handel, this "new" genre would show the way forward.

Sacred opera

Oratorio was born at almost the same time as opera, around 1600. It grew out of a religious order that prized ecstatic experience, and oratorio's blend of music and sacred texts conjured the state of rapture they sought.

The genre had grown and changed as it spread across Europe. And Handel, sniffing the air for new success, brought it to London.

Messiah was composed in just three weeks. Handel often wrote at this speed, in the tiny breathing space between opera seasons. Three weeks: barely enough time for the physical act of composition, let alone time to imbue the notes with life and love.

Handel moulded the oratorio form in his image: nothing should stop the momentum of his storytelling; virtuosity for its own sake was forbidden; variety in form, shape, sound, and character was crucial; and the chorus became central.

Messiah?

Messiah is missing an important element: its central hero.

Handel's oratorios typically give singing roles to their main characters. In *Saul* and *Belshazzar*, written around the time of *Messiah*, Saul and Belshazzar tell of their dizzying highs and terrifying falls.

But in *Messiah* our hero never speaks or sings. Jesus is born without mention of his mother or any wise men. Jesus's specific good works don't appear, and the disciples are entirely absent. And Jesus dies, but there is no Pilate, no real mention of a crucifixion.

The text

Charles Jennens, librettist of the *Messiah*, was something of a mystic. He believed in the transcendental divinity of Christ, and in an increasingly rationalist society this marked him as an outsider.

He called this text for *Messiah* “a meditation of our Lord.” On the title page, Jennens quotes one of Paul’s epistles, celebrating “the Mystery of Godliness.” Jennens’s central character is Jesus as idea, as “mystery,” rather than Jesus as flesh-and-blood human.

The music

Handel took Jennens’s non-narrative texts and made concrete, human drama. First, Handel keeps the “operatic” drama moving, connecting isolated movements into long scenes. But he varies the pacing, stopping the action for the calm of the “Pastoral Symphony,” for the despair of “He was despised.”

Second, Handel’s word-painting is everywhere here, from the flickering of vocal flames in “And He shall purify,” to the misty strings of “For behold,” and the cackling laughter of “All they that see Him.”

Finally, Handel helps this abstract text speak to audiences of all times and places. Jennens wrote for an audience that knew its Bible, knew what would unfold, knew how it would end. But Handel’s gripping and passionate music drags us into the emotion of his *Messiah*.

In recitatives, choruses, and arias, it is us lowly humans who worry, hope, predict, lament, and celebrate. Maybe we are thinking of Jesus, but maybe we are thinking of the people we love, the places we live, the good that we want to do.

Messiah did not connect with contemporary audiences. They may have found it blasphemous, been put off by the strangeness of its libretto. It would take ten years for kindling to catch, and when it did, it caught fire, blazing around the globe, across cultures, across centuries.

First Performance April 13, 1742, Dublin, Handel conducting with Christina Maria Avoglio, Susanna Maria Cibber, Mr. and Mrs. Maclaine (a London organist and his wife), and various singers from the Christ Church and Saint Patrick’s Cathedral choirs as soloists

First SLSO Performance December 6, 1881, Joseph Otten conducting

Most Recent SLSO Performance December 6, 2015, Bernard Labadie conducting with Lydia Teuscher, Kyle Ketelsen, Allyson McHardy, Jeremy Ovenden, and the St. Louis Symphony Chorus as soloists

Scoring 4 vocal soloists, chorus, 2 oboes, bassoon, 2 trumpets, timpani, harpsichord, portative organ, and strings

Performance Time approximately 2 hours and 10 minutes

Listening guide

Messiah's text is strange for several reasons: every word comes directly from the Bible; the oratorio doesn't tell a linear story; and this New Testament hero is mostly referred to in verses from the Old Testament. This guide is intended to give a little context: the division into "scenes" is adapted from Jennens's own approach. My commentary is in italics.

PART ONE: *Prophecy of the birth of Jesus; the nativity*

Scene 1: *The opening scene is a sort of Cliff's Notes version of the whole Messiah, setting the scene, laying out the stakes. Jennens covers: a prophecy of salvation; a prophecy of Jesus's coming; the effect of this coming on humans. The text is mostly drawn from the Old Testament Book of Isaiah.*

1. Overture. Orchestra. *Handel's Overture may capture the pain of a people in exile.*
2. "Comfort ye." Recitative (Tenor). *Handel chooses the plaintive sound of a tenor voice for this lone voice "in the wilderness."*
3. "Ev'ry valley." Aria (Tenor). *Flurries of notes express excitement, while repeated notes in the strings might capture the echoes of a large valley.*
4. "And the glory of the Lord." Chorus.
5. "Thus saith the Lord." Aria (Bass). *Handel shifts to terror, choosing a bass voice to announce the "voice of God."*
6. "But who may abide." Aria (Alto). *An ancient reference: metals were purified with fire (e.g. silver and lead have different boiling points).*
7. "And He shall purify." Chorus. *Voices here flicker like flames.*

Scene 2: *Here Jesus is named for the first time in Messiah. He is called Emmanuel ("God with us"). A path is then traced from darkness to light, ending with the chorus's anticipation of Jesus's birth.*

8. "Behold, a virgin shall conceive." Recitative (Alto).
9. "O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion." Aria (Alto)—Chorus. *The alto voice (in conversation with the violins) asks us to spread the good news. The chorus replies, spreading the news with its many voices.*
10. "For behold, darkness shall cover the earth." Recitative (Bass). *String mists introduce a voice of "darkness," which "shall arise," singing higher and higher.*
11. "The people that walked in darkness." Aria (Bass). *Handel gives this "walking" music a purposeful, striding tempo.*
12. "For unto us a Child is born." *We thrill, in preparation for...*

Scene 3: Jesus is born. We shift from Old Testament to New Testament texts for the nativity. This section is the only narrative “story” in Messiah.

13. Pifa (“Pastoral Symphony”). Orchestra. *Our nativity scene is set in rolling, pastoral hills. The title refers to pifferari, bands of roving bagpipers, mimicked with a drone and simple folk-tinged melodies.*

14. “There were shepherds abiding in the field.” Recitative (Soprano). Handel chooses the “angelic” soprano voice to narrate the angel’s appearance. Strings palpitate with anticipation.

15. “Glory to God.” Chorus. “A multitude of heavenly host” (i.e. the chorus) praises God. Trumpets blaze for the first time.

16. “Rejoice greatly.” Aria (Soprano).

17. “Then shall the eyes of the blind be open’d.” Recitative (Alto). *The remainder of Part One talks of Jesus’s good works.*

18. “He shall feed His flock.” Aria (Soprano).

19. “His yoke is easy.” Chorus. *We head to intermission with optimism: Jesus can carry our sins, our suffering. But this chorus may hint at what is to come: this “easy” and “light” movement is in fact very difficult to perform.*

PART TWO: The suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus

Scene 1: Unlike Part One’s “light” conclusion, the first scene of Part Two carries a heavy burden. Much of Handel’s music is slow. The text is mostly drawn from the Book of Isaiah.

20. “Behold the Lamb of God.” Chorus. *Jesus’s heavy burden is symbolized by sustained use of low bass notes.*

21. “He was despised.” Aria (Alto). *The longest aria in Messiah is also one of the saddest pieces ever composed in a major key. Short and lonely wisps eventually give way to the pounding of “smiting” blows.*

22. “Surely, He hath borne our griefs.” Chorus.

23. “And with His stripes we are healed.” Chorus.

24. “All we like sheep have gone astray.” Chorus. *The jauntiness of this chorus is jarring. “We” are pictured as partying it up “like sheep” while our savior suffers.*

25. “All they that see Him, laugh Him to scorn.” Recitative (Tenor). *Violins cackle.*

26. “He trusted in God.” Chorus. *The rules of this quite “academic”-sounding chorus might hint at the rules of trust that Jesus placed, that God “would deliver him.”*

27. “Thy rebuke hath broken His heart.” Recitative (Tenor).

28. “Behold, and see if there be any sorrow.” Aria (Tenor).

Scene 2: *This scene covers a lot of ground: Jesus is resurrected, evangelism spreads, humans reject God, God punishes humanity.*

- 29. "He was cut off out of the land of the living." Recitative (Soprano).
- 30. "But Thou didst not leave His soul in hell." Aria (Soprano).
- 31. "The Lord gave the word." *This chorus of "preachers" is sent out to evangelize, spreading the word of Jesus.*
- 32. "How beautiful are the feet of them." Aria (Soprano).
- 33. "Why do the nations so furiously rage together." Aria (Bass). *A "furious" comment on the vanity of politicians and leaders.*
- 34. "Let us break their bonds asunder." Chorus.
- 35. "He that dwelleth in heaven." Recitative (Tenor).
- 36. "Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron." Aria (Tenor).
- 37. "Hallelujah." Chorus. *Before this famous chorus, humans have been laughed at, broken with a rod, dashed into pieces. After those struggles, does the exaggerated celebration of "Hallelujah" feel somehow forced?*

PART THREE: Judgement Day; a hymn of thanksgiving

- 38. "I know that my Redeemer liveth." Aria (Soprano). *Handel's lilting music and use of the soprano voice lends openhearted innocence and optimism to this aria.*
- 39. "Since by man came death." Chorus.
- 40. "Behold, I tell you a mystery." Recitative (Bass).
- 41. "The trumpet shall sound." Aria (Bass). *Handel's Judgement Day is a celebratory occasion.*
- 42. "If God be for us who can be against." Aria (Soprano and Alto).
- 43. "Worthy is the Lamb." Chorus. *A majestic final chorus. Handel's final surprise is a meditative, appropriately mystical "Amen."*



Matthew Halls most recently performed with the SLSO in February 2018.

MATTHEW HALLS

The word “versatile” is an apt description for British conductor Matthew Halls. He first came to prominence as a keyboard player and early music conductor, but Halls is now better known for his dynamic and intelligent work with major symphony orchestras and opera companies and for his probing and vibrant interpretations of music of all periods.

Increasingly in demand by North American symphony orchestras, Halls has performed with the Cleveland and Philadelphia Orchestras; Dallas, Pittsburgh, Houston, Seattle, Indianapolis, and Utah Symphonies; Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra; and National Arts Centre Orchestra. His debut with the Toronto Symphony, in which he led Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, “captured much of the energy and excitement that its first audience must have felt at its premiere nearly 200 years ago” (*Toronto Star*). Having served as Artistic Director of the Oregon Bach Festival for five years, Halls is equally at home conducting baroque and contemporary repertoire.

In 2018/2019, Halls’ North American guest appearances include his debut with the Chicago Symphony and returns to the Dallas and Indianapolis Symphonies; and the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra. In addition, Halls conducts the San Diego and Jacksonville Symphonies, as well as the Handel and Haydn Society in Boston. Last season, he made his New York debut with Lincoln Center’s Mostly Mozart Festival in a performance with violinist Joshua Bell.

In recent seasons, Halls has performed in Australia with the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, and with the Auckland Philharmonia. He is a regular with the Iceland Symphony Orchestra, recently having presented a series of five performances traversing all of Beethoven’s piano concerti with Paul Lewis. Recent European appearances include Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, Warsaw Philharmonic, Mozarteum Salzburg, Philharmonie Zuidnederland, and Capriccio Barockorchester.

Halls is represented on disc with Handel’s *Parnasso in Festa*, winner of the Stanley Sadie Handel Recording Prize, released by Hyperion. On Linn Records, he has recorded a set of four Bach Harpsichord Concertos conducted from the keyboard, which Gramophone welcomed as “joyful and invigorating”, and Bach’s Easter and Ascension oratorios, as well as award-winning discs of Purcell’s Sonatas in Three and Four Parts.



Karina Gauvin most recently performed with the SLSO in February 2011.

KARINA GAUVIN

Recognized for her work in the baroque repertoire, Canadian soprano Karina Gauvin also sings Mahler, Britten, and the music of the late 20th and 21st centuries with equal success. The prestigious distinctions she has received include the title of “Soloist of the Year” awarded by the Communauté internationale des radios publiques de langue française, first prize in the CBC Radio competition for young performers, and the Virginia Parker Prize and Maggie Teyte Memorial Prize in London. In the 2017/2018, season she continues to thrill audiences both in the United States and Canada as soloist in Beethoven’s Symphony No. 9 for the Handel and Haydn Society, in *Messiah* with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, in Brahms’ *Ein Deutsches Requiem* with the Fort Wayne Philharmonic, and in a Russian Baroque program with Early Music Vancouver. She also tours widely in Europe, giving concerts and recitals in Switzerland, Poland, Russia, France, Germany, and Finland.

Gauvin has sung with the world’s greatest symphony orchestras, including the Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal, San Francisco Symphony, Chicago Symphony, New York Philharmonic, and Rotterdam Philharmonic, as well as baroque orchestras such as Les Talens Lyriques, the Venice Baroque Orchestra, Accademia Bizantina, Il Complesso Barocco, the Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin, the Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra, and Les Violons du Roy. She has performed under the direction of maestros Semyon Bychkov, Charles Dutoit, Bernard Labadie, Kent Nagano, Sir Roger Norrington, Helmuth Rilling, Christophe Rousset, and Michael Tilson Thomas. In addition, she has sung in recital with pianists Marc-André Hamelin, Angela Hewitt, Michael McMahon, and Roger Vignoles.



Krisztina Szabó is making her SLSO debut.

KRISZTINA SZABÓ

Hungarian-Canadian mezzo-soprano Krisztina Szabó is highly sought after in both North America and Europe as an artist of supreme musicianship and stagecraft, and has become known for her promotion and performance of contemporary Canadian works. Among her many laudatory reviews, Opera Canada declared her to be an “exceptional talent” after her performance of the title role of Dido in Purcell’s *Dido and Aeneas*, and after a performance with Tapestry Opera, the music blog, Schmopera wrote that “her instrument is one-of-a-kind and she has cemented herself as a darling of Canadian experimental music and opera...her sensibility and sensitivity to the material is truly inspiring.” In her hometown of Toronto, Canada, she has been nominated twice for a Dora Award for Outstanding Female Performance.

Engagements in the 2018/2019 season include being a featured performer in Steffani: Drama and Devotion and Handel’s *Messiah* with the Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra, *Stabat Mater* (Pergolesi) with Early Music Seattle, George Benjamin’s *Into the Little Hill* with Mahler Chamber Orchestra for Musikfest Berlin, *Kopernikus* (Claude Vivier) with Against the Grain Theatre (Toronto), and the premiere of a new oratorio by Barbara Croall entitled *Mizewe (Everywhere)* with Pax Christi Chorale. She will also be singing the world premiere of Canadian composer Ian Cusson’s *Where There’s A Wall* with the National Arts Centre Orchestra and the Canadian premiere of Toshio Hosokawa’s *The Raven* for Toronto New Music Projects at the University of Toronto.



Nicholas Phan most recently performed with the SLSO in November 2016.

NICHOLAS PHAN

American tenor Nicholas Phan is increasingly recognized as an artist of distinction. Praised for his keen intelligence, captivating stage presence, and natural musicianship, he performs regularly with the world's leading orchestras and opera companies. Also an avid recitalist, in 2010 he co-founded the Collaborative Arts Institute of Chicago (CAIC) to promote art song and vocal chamber music.

Phan once again launches his new season in Chicago, curating CAIC's seventh annual Collaborative Arts Festival. This year's three-day festival, "The Song as Drama," will examine the narrative power of the song cycle and the ability of song to tell epic stories with minimal forces. Other highlights of his 2018/2019 season are two role debuts: Eumolpus in Stravinsky's *Perséphone*, with Michael Tilson Thomas and the San Francisco Symphony; and the title role in Handel's *Jephtha*, with Boston Baroque and Martin Pearlman. The title role in Bernstein's *Candide*, with Marin Alsop and the Israel Philharmonic, will mark his debut in Israel. In addition to three programs with the San Francisco Symphony, he will return to major orchestras across the country including the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Dallas Symphony Orchestra, Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, and Colorado Symphony. A celebrated recording artist, Phan will be heard on two forthcoming recordings: Berlioz's *Roméo et Juliette* with Tilson Thomas and the San Francisco Symphony, (recorded in June 2017); and Handel's *Joseph and His Brethren* (recorded in December 2017) with Philharmonia Baroque and Nicholas McGegan, singing the roles of Simeon and Judah.



William Berger is making his SLSO debut.

WILLIAM BERGER

Baritone William Berger, recently described as “one of the best of our younger baritones” by *Gramophone* magazine, is making a name for himself in concert halls and opera houses on both sides of the Atlantic.

Following two years as a member of the Young Singers Programme at English National Opera, Berger made his debuts at Liceu Barcelona, Vlaamse Opera, Opera Lucerne, Opéra de Toulon, and the Aix-en-Provence, Göttingen, and Edinburgh International Festivals. Opera engagements have included the title role of Monteverdi’s *L’Orfeo*, “Escamillo” in Bizet’s *Carmen*, all of Mozart’s leading baritone roles, including Count Almaviva, Don Giovanni, Guglielmo, Papageno (*Magic Flute* for Opéra de Toulon), as well as roles in operas by Handel, Haydn, Puccini, Janáček, and Weill.

Berger began his singing career at age 10 as a boy chorister in his native South Africa. He went on to study voice, piano, percussion, and conducting, and is a graduate and Associate of London’s Royal Academy of Music. He is a recipient of numerous prizes and awards, including the 2010 Ernst Haefliger Competition in Switzerland, the Kathleen Ferrier Society Bursary for Young Singers, the Countess of Munster Trust Scholarship, the Musicians Benevolent Fund Grant, and the Ernest Oppenheimer Memorial Trust Award.



Amy Kaiser is Director of the St. Louis Symphony Chorus.

AMY KAISER

Director of the St. Louis Symphony Chorus since 1995, Amy Kaiser is one of the country's leading choral directors. She has conducted the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra in Handel's *Messiah*, Schubert's Mass in E flat, Vivaldi's *Gloria*, and sacred works by Haydn and Mozart, as well as Young People's Concerts. Guest conductor for the Berkshire Choral Festival in Massachusetts, Santa Fe, and at Canterbury Cathedral and Music Director of the Desoff Choirs in New York for 12 seasons, she led many performances of major works at Lincoln Center.

Other conducting engagements include Chicago's Grant Park Music Festival, Peter Schickele's PDQ Bach with the New Jersey Symphony, and more than 50 performances with the Metropolitan Opera Guild. Principal Conductor of the New York Chamber Symphony's School Concert Series for seven seasons, Kaiser also led Jewish Opera at the Y, and many programs for the 92nd Street Y's acclaimed *Schubertiade*. She has prepared choruses for the New York Philharmonic, Ravinia Festival, Mostly Mozart Festival, and Opera Orchestra of New York.

Kaiser is a regular pre-concert speaker for the SLSO and presents popular classes for the Symphony Lecture Series and Opera Theatre of Saint Louis. A former faculty member at Manhattan School of Music and The Mannes College of Music, she was a Fulbright Fellow at Oxford University and holds a degree in musicology from Columbia University. A graduate of Smith College, she was awarded the Smith College Medal for outstanding professional achievement.

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