

Dear Friends,

Since 25th April should have seen us putting on *Messiah* at the Colosseum, it seems appropriate to give the second issue of Corona Chronicle a distinctly *Messiah* flavour.

First and foremost, I am delighted to announce the long-awaited results of our *Messiah* Miscellany Quiz and congratulate **Roger Prangnell** as the outright winner with **Pauline Rogers** and a brace of Rosemarys – **Rosemary Reed and Rosemary Mackenzie-Corby** sharing second place. We will draw lots to determine who wins second and third prize as soon as we are able to. Highly commended runners-up were **Vanessa Robinson, Jo Davison** and **Audrey Adams**. Thank you to everyone who entered the quiz – answers (and details of the prizes) can be found on page 3 & 4 of this newsletter.

Zoom report

We have already had 2 virtual rehearsals, using Zoom, the first on Monday 13th April and the second on Monday 20th April. In each case, between 60 and 70 people signed up and generally enjoyed the experience. For the first rehearsal, Michael chose Bruckner's very beautiful short anthem, *Locus Iste*, for us to learn and the *Hallelujah Chorus* for us to test the technology! In the second week we had a go at a madrigal – *Never weather-beaten Sail* by Thomas Campion – and *Cantate Domino* by Giuseppe Pitoni. In all cases, Michael has recorded rehearsal tracks for each part and recommends that we practise ahead of each session, as usual! The tracks, and copies of the music can be found in the News column on our website. Do consider signing up for future rehearsals – Nikki will email the necessary links when available. **Big thank-you to Michael** for putting in the time to prepare them.

Keep well and stay safe,

Judy

NEWS

- Keeping to a *Messiah* theme, the **Self-Isolation Virtual Choir's *Messiah*** has already attracted a huge following. You get weekly rehearsal sessions (to join in real time, or whenever convenient) and the aim is to stitch everything together next month in a virtual concert with singers from across the world – good practice for our own delayed concert which we very much hope we might be able to run in October. More information from the link here <https://www.theseisolationchoir.com/>
- Other virtual practice sessions are available such as **Gareth Malone's Great British Home Chorus** www.greatbritishhomechorus.com and the Making Music supported www.carryonsinging.com
- Our own Facebook group <https://www.facebook.com/groups/625783124932009/> is a great place to post and share information about such initiatives for keeping us all singing in lockdown as well as useful links to musical and other cultural offerings such as the recently launched **Royal Opera House YouTube channel** which screened the Jonathan Miller production of *Così fan Tutte* earlier this month, still available here: <https://www.youtube.com/user/RoyalOperaHouse/>
- You might like to know of the **Royal Society of Musicians of Great Britain** <https://www.rsmgb.org> – a charity which among other things provides vital financial assistance, advice and guidance to professional musicians unable to work due to accident, illness or old age. Founded in 1738, **Handel** was one of its first Trustees; raised large sums of money for it during his lifetime and left it £1,000 in his Will. Being a charity run by musicians for musicians, the Society is uniquely placed to fully understand the challenges faced within the profession. They have a great website too and as one of the oldest charities in the country, right now they are fulfilling a key role in supporting many of our musicians who face real hardship in the current economic melt-down. I'm asking my family and friends to support it via my Facebook Fundraiser instead of doing birthday gifts this year. You can also donate to RSMGB directly via a Just Giving link on their website.
- Readers will be sad to learn that **Ruth Blewitt's** husband, Frank, succumbed to Covid19 recently. Our condolences are with Ruth and her daughter at this time – it's good to know that she has felt well-supported by her many friends.

JUST FOR FUN

A Yorkshire Messiah

Bill's mates in the pub had heard that he had recently attended a performance of *Messiah* in the Town Hall. They wanted to know how he had got on.

"Ee well!" said Bill "It were fair champion. I wouldn'ta missed it for all'tea in China. When I got there the Town Hall were crowded. It were choc full o'folk and I had a job to get a seat but no wonder - it were all them singers -- they took up half the gallery, like. There was a chap larking about on t'organ although he weren't playing nowt in particular, just running his fingers up and down as if he were practising.

Well, after a bit a lot of chaps came in carrying fiddles, then they brought in t'Messiah - well, that's what I took it t'be. It were the biggest instrument on t'platform and it were covered in a big bag. Well, they took the bag off it and then some bloke rubbed its belly with a stick and you should have heard it groan! It were summat like a dying cow!

I was just thinking of going when a little chap came on, all dolled up in a white waistcoat and wi' a flower in his buttonhole, and everything were dead quiet. You could have heard a pin drop! He had a stick in his hand and started waving it about and all the singers stared at him I reckon they was wondering what was t'matter wi' him. Then they all started to sing and they hadn't been going long before they was fighting like cats! I reckon he shoulda walloped one or two of 'em with that stick of his. First one side said that they were t' King o'Glory then t'other side said they were, and they went at it hammer and tongs, but it fizzled out and I've no idea which side won.

Then there were a bit of bother about some sheep that was lost. I don't know who they belonged to but one lot of singers must have been very fond o'mutton 'cos they kept on singing "All we like sheep". I couldn't help saying to a bloke next to me that sheep's all right in moderation but I like a bit o'beef meself, and he looked daggers at me and said 'shhhh' so I shushed.

A lot o'wimmen stood up after that and a load of 'em looked as if they were well ... getting' on a bit, you know. Some of 'em must ha' been 65 if they were a day! They sang "Unto us a child is born" and t'chaps sang back "Wonderful" an' I thought t'meself - Wonderful? It's a bloomin' miracle!

After that they sobered down a bit and sang about a lass called Joyce Greatly. I've never heard of her meself but the chaps had 'cos they all looked mighty pleased about it. Then some bloke got up and said he were the king o'kings, another one said he was and then, blow me, they all started arguing about it. I was getting a bit fed up when everybody stood up to see what was the matter and they suddenly shouted "Hallelujah it's going t' rain for ever and ever". Well, at that I jumped up and made straight for t'door. I'd 'ad me money's worth and besides, I was thinking that if it were going t' rain for ever and ever I'd better get home before the floods came.

Still, it was a real good do though - you should'a come but, oh, I do hope they find them sheep."

Contributed by Vanessa Robinson

This week in the Venner kitchen, Tim writes 'We are now into a fifth week of self-isolation and it's very upsetting for me to witness Rosemary standing at the window, staring aimlessly into space. It breaks my heart to see her like this and I've thought very hard of how I can cheer her up. I've even considered letting her back in the house. But rules are rules!'

Ed. He's all heart, is our Tim!

For Trump fans everywhere

A plane with 5 passengers on board – Donald Trump, Boris Johnson, Angela Merkel, the Pope and a ten year old schoolgirl – is about to crash and there are only 4 parachutes. Trump says 'I'm the smartest man in the USA and I'm needed to solve the pandemic.' He takes a parachute and jumps. Johnson says 'And I'm needed to sort out the Covid19 mess in Britain.' He takes the second parachute and jumps. The Pope says 'The world's Catholics depend on me for comfort in a time of fear.' He takes the third parachute and jumps.

Angela Merkel says to the 10 year old girl 'I've lived a good part of my life, and yours is only just starting. You must have the last parachute.' But the little girl replies 'Don't worry; there are two parachutes left. The smartest man in the USA just took my school bag.'

MESSIAH MISCELLANY QUIZ

The Answers

	Question	Answer	Marks
1.	<p>Georg Friedrich Händel was born on 23 February 1685 in Halle (Germany) and died 14 April 1759 in London.</p> <p>Q. Two other famous composers were born in the same year as Handel. Who are they?</p>	<p>1. J S Bach 2. Domenico Scarlatti</p>	2
2.	<p>Handel lived in London from 1712 until his death in 1759.</p> <p>Q. Where was <i>Messiah</i> composed?</p>	25 Brook Street, London – now the Handel Museum	2
3.	<p>The first performance of <i>Messiah</i> took place on 13 April 1742. Advertisements requested that Ladies attend 'without Hoops' to their skirts and that 'Gentlemen are desired to come without their swords' in order to increase the capacity of the hall. Handel estimated that the venue could hold 600, but an extra 100 people were eventually crammed in.</p> <p>Q. Where did this first performance take place?</p>	In the newly opened Great Music Hall in Fishamble Street, Dublin	2
4.	<p>A famous 18th century theologian attended the premiere of <i>Messiah</i> in 1742, later writing in his journal that 'some parts were affecting but I doubt it has staying power.'</p> <p>Q. Who was this theologian?</p>	John Wesley , co-founder of the Methodist church	1
5.	<p>The first London performance of <i>Messiah</i> was given in March 1743 at Covent Garden, attended by King George the Second.</p> <p>Q. Apocryphally, what tradition began on that occasion – and why?</p>	At the end of the Hallelujah Chorus, King George stood to mark his appreciation. When the King stood, everyone else had to follow.	2
6.	<p>In a letter to a colleague, Handel's librettist wrote 'I shall show you a collection I gave to Handel, call'd <i>Messiah</i>, which I value highly, and he has made a fine Entertainment of it, tho' not near so good as he might and ought to have done.'</p> <p>Q. What was the name of Handel's librettist?</p>	Charles Jennens	1
7.	<p><i>Messiah</i> was originally scored for strings, trumpets and drums.</p> <p>Q. Which 2 instruments were the first to be added in a later revision</p>	Oboes and bassoons	2
8.	Q. To which London hospital did Handel leave a fair copy of <i>Messiah</i> in his Will?	The Foundling Hospital in Coram Fields	1
9.	<p>In 1857 a 'Great Handel Festival' was held at which <i>Messiah</i> and other Handel oratorios were performed with a chorus of 2,000 singers and an orchestra of 500.</p> <p>Q. Where did the festival take place?</p>	In London, at the Crystal Palace	1

	Question	Answer	
10.	Q. Where can you see Handel's personal draft score of <i>Messiah</i> ?	The British Library or online at http://www.bl.uk/turning-the-pages	1
11.	There have been many editions of <i>Messiah</i> , several still in print. Q. Which 20 th century musicologist produced an edition in which more instruments were added to accommodate the increasingly large choirs being used for performances?	Ebenezer Prout , published by Novello in 1902	1
12.	Q. Which famous composer's re-writing of Handel's original score was premiered in Vienna in 1789?	Mozart . The premiere was presented on 6 th March 1789, within the magnificent Baroque splendour of the Palace Palffy in Vienna.	1
13.	A world-famous and much-loved contralto was invited by conductor Leslie Regan to sing with WPS in a performance of <i>Messiah</i> on 24 March 1947. Q. Who was she?	Kathleen Ferrier . She declined the offer, citing an overload of engagements in the same week as our concert. *	1
14.	Internationally renowned soprano Isobel Baillie was particularly associated with the soprano role in <i>Messiah</i> , which she sang with Watford Philharmonic Society on several occasions in the 1950s. Q. How many times in her career is she thought to have sung the role – over 100/ over 500/ over 1,000?	Over 1000 . Her first performance of <i>Messiah</i> was at the age of 15.	1

* Bit of a trick question! Contralto Freda Townson actually sang in the concert – but only after Kathleen Ferrier had declined Leslie Regan's offer. This information can be found on our website under Our History, which includes the 75th Jubilee Exhibition panels, featuring a letter to the Society from her agent.



The prizes

- First prize is a phonetically appropriate bottle of little known but well-reputed Lebanese red wine – it's called **Massaya!!**
- Second prize is a copy of Jane Glover's entertaining and informative biography *Handel In London*.
- Third prize is a ceramic mug inscribed with Handel's signature.

FROM OUR OWN (MUSICAL) CORRESPONDENT

Messiah in Dublin

In 1741 Handel was invited to Dublin for a series of concerts by the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. Prior to the Act of Union of 1801, Ireland was a separate kingdom with its own parliament, ruled by a Lord Lieutenant or Viceroy. Dublin in the early 1700s had a 'second city' status. It had an active musical life and Handel's music was very popular. Handel brought with him a number of established works, known successes such as *Acis and Galatea*, *L'Allegro*, *Alexander's Feast* and *Saul*. He also brought a new composition, *Messiah*.

Originally, a series of six subscription concerts were planned and the first was a performance of *L'Allegro* on 23rd December 1741. The new concert hall was full and the audience were effusive. The *Dublin Journal* reported the following week, 'The Performance was superior to any Thing of the Kind in this kingdom before, and the Nobility and Gentry.....expressed their great Satisfaction.'

Immediately it became obvious that the excitement and enthusiasm generated by the music and the presence of Handel himself dictated that six concerts were not nearly enough. So, a second group of six concerts were planned, which began in mid-February, 1742. This meant Handel had to stay much longer and it was ten months before he returned to London. The newly built Neale's Musick Hall in Fishamble Street was the venue where many performances took place. Its acoustic was particularly good.

The first performance of *Messiah* was on 12th April and the announcement in the *Dublin Journal* of 27th March proclaimed: 'For the Relief of Prisoners... and the Support of Mercer's Hospital on Monday the 12th April, will be performed at the Musick Hall in Fishamble Street, *Mr Handel's new Grand Oratorio, call'd the Messiah....*'.

Significantly, there was a rehearsal on 9th April to which the public were admitted and which generated enormous excitement. The following morning the *Dublin News-letter* declared that 'Mr Handel's new sacred oratorio....in the opinion of the best Judges, far surpasses anything of that Nature, which has been performed in this or any other Kingdom'. In anticipation of great crowds for the first performance, 'Ladies were now urged to come without Hoops, as it will greatly increase the Charity, by making room for more company' Similarly, 'the Gentlemen are desired to come without their Swords'.

The anticipation and publicity generated by the public rehearsal was greatly exceeded by the reception at the first performance. The reports in the *Dublin Gazette* (and other publications) all had much the same account:

Words are wanting to express the exquisite Delight it afforded to the admiring crowded Audience. The Sublime, the Grand and the Tender. Adapted to the most elevated, majestic and moving Words, conspired to transport and charm the ravished Heart and Ear.....

Handel's final promotion in Dublin, 'at the particular Desire of the Nobility and Gentry' was a repeat performance of *Messiah* on 3rd June, equally well received.

Handel wrote the work in an unbelievably short time – about three weeks – in a sustained period of inspiration. He is quoted as saying "I did think I did see all Heaven before me and the great God Himself." The words, from the King James Bible, were compiled by Charles Jennens, one of Handel's long-term operatic librettists.

The first London performances (there were three in quick succession) were in March 1743, almost certainly without the presence of George II – the court records (always very detailed and complete) do not record him being there. So, whatever the origins of the story about the king rising to his feet for the Hallelujah Chorus, it was not then. The work did not make a big impact – there was some disapproval and indifference. Part of the reason was that the presentation of a sacred work in a theatre was felt to be inappropriate. But there were other reasons – the London audience was much more used to dramatic presentations with a coherent plot. *Messiah* is – almost - a meditation on the coming of Christ, His life, His death and resurrection. It was only later, in 1750, that its true nature began to be appreciated; as a great work; an inspiration; a masterpiece. And so it has remained.

Graham Wheeler

Thanks to all contributors to this edition. How many more issues we produce will depend on further contributions being received – keep them coming in!

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