

WILD ARTS PRESENTS

G. F. HANDEL
MESSIAH

DECEMBER 2024

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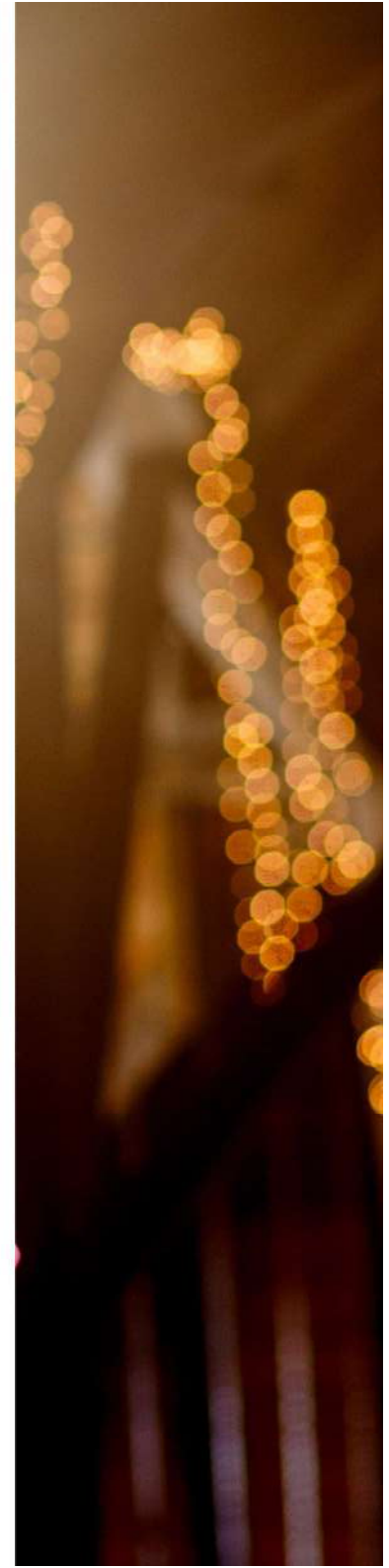
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Programme by Max Parfitt, November 2024
All photos by Lucy J Toms (@lucyjtomsp photography)

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Welcome to our *Messiah*.

We have had a wonderful 2024, performing at over 50 venues nationwide to almost twice the number of people as in 2023, as well as making our first steps into Europe, with three performances of *Die Zauberflöte* in the Neuer Garten, Potsdam.

I was delighted that Wild Arts was nominated for an International Opera Award for sustainability, as one of the reasons I started the company two years ago was to show that we can do things within the boundaries of what will keep the planet habitable and flourishing. All of our productions have so far met the stringent Theatre Green Book gold standard of sustainability, and we took the train to Berlin for our Potsdam performances.

This summer we worked with 500 primary school students and their teachers, providing six weeks of lesson plans woven into their school syllabus, as well as six masterclasses (led by our Young Artists), three specially arranged performances of *The Magic Flute* for schools, and a series of spotlight performances from young musicians and youth choirs.

We also ran the second year of our Young Artists Programme, giving exceptionally talented emerging artists precious performing opportunities – not just singing in the chorus but taking principal roles both on and off stage, working alongside established artists. We are excited to be expanding the education and Young Artists Programmes over the next few years, as well as developing new community engagement projects, extending our reach to a wider audience.

A huge thank you to the many people who make all this possible – our wonderful supporters, the performers, the behind-the-scenes team, and of course our audience.

Next year will be an exciting one for Wild Arts, with a new production of *Eugene O'Neill* directed by Dominic Dromgoole. We will be making our debut at the Minack Theatre, Saffron Hall, the Northern Aldborough Festival, and Opera Holland Park among others. We will also be founding summer opera festivals at Forde Abbey in Dorset, Kelvedon Hall in Essex, Owlpen Manor in Gloucestershire, and Bletchington Park in Oxfordshire to complement our established Essex Summer Opera Festival at Layer Marney Tower, where our new productions are premiered.

We will also bring back last year's feel-good hit show *The Elixir of Love*, returning by popular demand, and we will of course create a new version of our Opera Evening show, which we will take to all corners of the UK. We have been invited back to four wonderful festivals in Thorington, Cambridge, Deal, and Thaxted, and in the autumn we will be inviting some of the UK's best loved musicians to celebrate the 25th anniversary of our own Roman River Festival, including new stage versions of *The Yellow Wallpaper* and Gogol's *Diary of a Madman*.

We have had such a wonderful response to our staging of *Messiah* that we will again finish with a series of performances of the work, and there are already exciting new projects in the pipeline for 2026, including a dramatised version of Bach's *St John Passion*, and a recording of Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*.

I hope that you are as excited as we are for next year and beyond.



Orlando Jopling
Artistic Director



MESSIAH

AN ORATORIO

Music **George Frideric Handel**

Text **Carl Jennens** compiled from
the King James Bible and the Coverdale Psalter

Soprano	Tenor
Lucy Hall	Guy Elliott
Natasha Page	Sam Marston
Mezzo	Bass
Catherine Backhouse	Edward Hawkins
Martha Jones	Timothy Nelson

The Wild Arts Ensemble

Musical Director / Harpsichord **Orlando Jopling**
Violin **Sijie Chen** and **Will McGahon** | Viola **Hannah Shaw**
Cello **Reinoud Ford** | Double Bass **Marianne Schofield**
Oboe **Mark Baigent** and **Geoff Coates** | Bassoon **Chris Rawley**
Trumpet **Brendan Musk** and **Sam Lewis**
Timpani **Tom Lee**

(All performers, biographies, and dates p20-25)

*The Wild Arts Ensemble Leader's chair is sponsored by
Patrick and Louise Grattan*

Team and Creatives

Staging **Tom Morris**
Associate Director **Rosie Kat**
Crib and Cross **Ruth Paton**
Producer **Kirsty Hopkins**
Associate Producer **Max Parfitt**
Tour Manager **Joseph Lenehan**
Orchestral Manager **Will McGahon**
Marketing **Bethan Sheppard**

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MESSIAH: AN ORATORIO

Tonight's performance contains elements of staging devised by the company in a workshop with theatre director Tom Morris.

In our telling, the story is happening now, and the performers and audience are part of the same community. We start at the end of a period of conflict with a surprising message – 'Comfort ye.' As the well-known story unfolds, the lightness and optimism of the miraculous birth is contrasted by the Passion and by an exploration of the tragic paradox of the ritual of the sacrificial lamb.

The music is so universal that sometimes we forget to take in the meaning of the text that is the starting point. For instance, the cries of 'Hallelujah,' reinforced by war-like trumpets and drums, are an enthusiastic response to the tenor's suggestion to 'break the angry nations with rods of iron' and 'dash them to pieces like vessels.'

This is both religious text and operatic drama – a distant story brought close and interwoven with the personal expressions of a composer who is at once at the height of his fame, and at his most troubled.

PART I

Scene One *Isaiah prophecies salvation*

Sinfony (Overture)

Comfort ye / Ev'ry valley (*Tenor*)

And the glory of the Lord (*Chorus*)

Scene Two *The coming judgement*

Thus saith the Lord (*Bass*)

But who may abide (*Alto*)

And He shall purify (*Chorus*)

Scene Three *The prophecy of Christ's birth*

Behold, a virgin shall conceive (*Alto*)

O thou that tellest (*Alto & Chorus*)

For behold, darkness (*Bass*)

The people that walked in darkness (*Bass*)

For unto us a child is born (*Chorus*)

Scene Four *The annunciation to the shepherds*

Pifa ("Pastoral Symphony")

There were shepherds (*Soprano*)

And lo, the angel of the Lord (*Soprano*)

And the angel said unto them (*Soprano*)

And suddenly there was with the angel (*Soprano*)

Glory to God (*Chorus*)

Scene Five *Christ's healing and redemption*

Rejoice greatly (*Soprano*)

Then shall the eyes of the blind (*Alto*)

He shall feed his flock (*Alto & Soprano*)

His yoke is easy (*Chorus*)

Interval

PARTS II & III

Scene One *Christ's Passion*

Behold the Lamb of God (*Chorus*)

He was despised (*Alto*)

Surely He hath borne our griefs (*Chorus*)

And with His stripes (*Chorus*)

All we, like sheep (*Chorus*)

All they that see Him (*Tenor*)

He trusted in God (*Chorus*)

Thy rebuke hath broken His heart (*Tenor*)

Behold and see (*Tenor*)

He was cut off (*Tenor*)

Scene Two *The beginnings of Gospel preaching and its rejection*

How beautiful are the feet (*Soprano*)

Why do the nations (*Bass*)

Let us break their bonds (*Chorus*)

He that dwelleth in heaven (*Tenor*)

Scene Three *God's ultimate victory*

Thou shalt break them (*Tenor*)

Hallelujah (*Chorus*)

Scene Four *The promise of eternal life*

I know that my Redeemer liveth (*Soprano*)

Since by man came death (*Chorus*)

Scene Five *The Day of Judgement and the conquest of sin*

Behold, I tell you a mystery (*Bass*)

The trumpet shall sound (*Bass*)

Scene Six *The acclamation of the Messiah*

Worthy is the Lamb (*Chorus*)

Amen (*Chorus*)

Scene One *Isaiah prophecies salvation*

Sinfony (Overture)

Accompagnato (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 pardoned.
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)

Air (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 together; for the
mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

(Isaiah 40 : 5)

Scene Two *The coming judgement*

Accompagnato (Bass)

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, even the messenger
of the Covenant, whom ye delight in:
behold, He shall come, saith the Lord of
Hosts.

(Malachi 3 : 1)

Air (Alto)

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)

Scene Three *The prophecy of Christ's birth*

Recitative (Alto)

Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a
Son, and shall call his name Emmanuel,
GOD WITH US.

(Isaiah 7 : 14; Matthew 1 : 23)

Air (Alto) & 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)

Accompagnato (Bass)

For behold, 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)

Air (Bass)

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)

Scene Four *The annunciation to the shepherds*

Pifa ("Pastoral Symphony")

Recitative (Soprano)

There were shepherds abiding in the field,
keeping watch over their flocks by night.

(Luke 2 : 8)



Accompagnato (*Soprano*)

And 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)

Accompagnato (*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, good will toward men.

(Luke 2 : 14)

Scene Five Christ's healing and redemption

Air (*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.

(Zechariah 9 : 9-10)

Recitative (*Alto*)

Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, 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)

Aria (*Alto and Soprano*)

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.

(Isaiah 40 : 11)

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.

(Matthew 11 : 28-29)

Chorus

His yoke is easy, and his burden is light.

(Matthew 11 : 30)

Interval

Scene One Christ's Passion

Chorus

Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world.

(John 1 : 29)

Air (*Alto*)

He was despised and 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 the hair: He hid not His face from shame and spitting.

(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 every one to his own way, and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

(Isaiah 53 : 6)

Accompagnato (*Tenor*)

All they that see Him laugh Him to scorn; they shoot out their lips, and shake their heads, saying:

(Psalms 22 : 7)

Chorus

He trusted in God that He would deliver Him; let Him deliver Him, if He delight in Him.

(Psalms 22 : 8)

Accompagnato (*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.

(Psalms 69 : 20)

Arioso (*Tenor*)

Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto His sorrow.

(Lamentations 1 : 12)

Accompagnato (*Tenor*)

He was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgressions of Thy people was He stricken.

(Isaiah 53 : 8)

Scene Two The beginnings of Gospel preaching and its rejection

Air (*Soprano*)

How beautiful are the feet of them: that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things.

(Romans 10 : 15)

Air (*Bass*)

Why do the nations so furiously rage together: 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.

(Psalms 2 : 1-2)

Chorus

Let us break their bonds asunder, and cast away their yokes from us.

(Psalms 2 : 3)

Recitative (*Tenor*)

He that dwelleth in heaven shall laugh them to scorn; the Lord shall have them in derision.

(Psalms 2 : 4)

Scene Three God's ultimate victory

Air (*Tenor*)

Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.

(Psalms 2 : 9)

Chorus

Hallelujah! for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth.

(Revelation 19 : 6)

The kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever.

(Revelation 11 : 15)

KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

(Revelation 19 : 16)

Hallelujah!

Scene Four The promise of eternal life

Air (*Soprano*)

I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.

(Job 19 : 25-26)

For now is Christ risen from the dead, the first fruits of them that sleep.

(I 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.

(I Corinthians 15 : 21-22)

Accompagnato (*Bass*)

Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.

(I Corinthians 15 : 51-52)

Air (*Bass*)

The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption and this mortal must put on immortality.

(I Corinthians 15 : 52-53)

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 power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever.

(Revelation 5 : 12-13)

Amen.

AN IDEA OF HEAVEN: THE FIRST NIGHT OF HANDEL'S *MESSIAH*

Dominic Dromgoole

Georg Frideric Handel arrived in London in 1710 with a splash, befitting both his outsized talent and his considerable frame. His first act was to premiere his opera *Rinaldo*, performed with a spectacular firework display of overpaid *castrati*, exorbitant costuming, fire-breathing dragons, trundling mountains and flitting birds. It set new standards for theatrical excess and kickstarted a turbulent forty-year love affair between the British public and this outsized German showman. Over three decades, Handel and his audience taught each other how to listen to music and how to grow the form.

But London has always taken a pleasure in kicking out the heels from under anyone who might consider themselves safe. Fashion turned against Italian opera, and musical society split into factions, thinning out the money available to both sides (to everyone's detriment). Handel slowly slipped from his perch. His last, opera, *Deidamia*, opened in the spring of 1741, and played for a miserable three performances.

One response from Handel was to midwife a new form, the English oratorio – a full-length musical setting of a sacred text. The origins for this can be traced back to the medieval mystery plays and the playing of sacred stories in dramatic form. Many enjoyed this new form, but it had an elemental strength that disturbed its critics. One Puritan critic wrote that the music had 'the force of gunpowder,

and should be as carefully looked after, that no unhallow'd Fire give it the power of destroying.' The Bishop of London forced the halt of a performance of Handel's *Esther*, stating that a biblical story should not be played in 'houses which entertained sodomitical clubs.'

With his opera career forestalled, his oratorios only fitfully successful, a clique of the aristocracy trying to wreck his career, and money draining out of his account, this was a dark-clouded hour for Handel. His health was far from strong and, in 1740, he suffered a minor stroke and went off to recuperate in a German spa. Soon after, at a dinner, he had a further stroke. At this low ebb, out of the blue came a formal invitation from an Irish musical society to come to Dublin (to the Music Hall on Fishamble Street) and present his work. There was a world elsewhere.



Jacob Houbraken's Frontispiece for Handel's *Israel in Egypt* (1739). Reproduced by kind permission of the British Library.

On Saturday 22 August 1741, at the age of 56, Handel sat down to write the *Messiah*. He had it finished – solos, recitative, massed choruses, complex orchestration and all – on 14 September. The whole thing had taken just twenty-four days. Almost a quarter of a million notes, or around thirty notes a minute. On finishing, he wrote on his autograph score, *SDG – Solo Die Gloria* (To God Alone the Glory).

Midday, 13 April 1742

Fishamble Street was a tight and crooked street, and the Music Hall was tucked in a corner. A coach and horses could not be manoeuvred up the street, so for the many who arrived in sedan chairs – a box carried by porters fore and aft – it proved impossible for these cumbersome vehicles to share space. Foul-mouthed Dublin porters and steerers flung commands, demands and insults, jockeying to pass without scratching their buffed surfaces. Flouncey chaps stared grumpily from their elevated chairs. All were uncertainly afloat in an angry squall of vanity and fashion.

The advertisement had gone out a week before, in suitably marbled prose, inviting any who wished to pay half a guinea to attend Fishamble Street Music Hall to hear the premiere of the *Messiah*. Tickets flew out and more had to be made. A further advertisement requested 'that the Ladies who honour this performance with their presence... come without hoops' to make more room, and that the chaps should 'come without their swords.'

The spectators could buy at the door a printed wordbook for sixpence, which contained the text, and, once sat, they would have seen Handel installed at his keyboard, from where he would direct the orchestra. Handel liked to sport an enormous white wig on these occasions, and when the playing went well, as Burney describes, 'it had a certain nod, or vibration which manifested his pleasure.' Burney continues:

His hand was so fat, that the knuckles, which usually appear

convex, were like those of a child, dinted or dimpled in, so as to be rendered concave; however his touch was so smooth, that his fingers seemed to grow to the keys. When he played, no motion and scarcely the fingers themselves could be discovered ... Handel's general look was somewhat heavy and sour; but when he did smile, it was his sire the sun, burst out of a black cloud.

He had every reason to smile as the playing progressed, though most artists live in the flood plain between the twin rivers of self-congratulation and self-pity and Handel was no different. Alongside a full-hearted capacity for emphatic and commanding joy – *Rejoice! Rejoice!* instructed with Teutonic bombast – was its counter, a tremulous and gentle vulnerability, Charles Jennens's chosen words allowing the composer to express his soul.

The old Hebrew word *Hallelujah* ('Praise You, God'), repeated over sixty times within its one chorus, served as a mantra for Handel to entrance himself, an inspiration to service and a vehicle to express his heart. The four big open vowels allowed his force and energy to flow through them. Meanwhile, the text of the aria 'He was despised and rejected' saw the composer's vulnerability rise to a pitch of sacred self-pity:

*He was despised and rejected of men,
a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.
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.*

Each phrase or half phrase is wrung out as a gentle sob, before halting nervously as it is responded to with a flutter of strings, which seem to float on the thermals of emotion released by the voice. It is heart-hurting, as though the singer has to break off after each

thought, since she doesn't have the strength to go on, and needs to calm her palpitations.

These words – whether bold declarative statements, tender expressions of weakness, or joyous affirmations of the sublime – are the personification of the ecstasies and pains of Christ and of man, but in Fishamble Street, other currents crisscrossed the performance and maximalised its charge. Handel's music, challenged by the aristocracy and by the shifting fashions of the world, was making manifest the isolation of genius and restoring its creator his acclaim.

In a good performance of *Messiah* – one with no pomp, no decoration, and no excess of honeyed beauty; where there is urgency and drive and passion – one air towards the end emerges with force: 'The trumpet shall sound... and we shall be changed.' Repeated over and over, this single phrase hammers the consciousness, and seems to sum up the heart and desires of its creator – *we shall be changed*.

— Dominic Dromgoole, writer, director, and former Artistic Director of Shakespeare's Globe. From *Astonish Me! First Nights that Changed the World* (Profile Books). The extract above was included by kind permission of the author and abridged for Wild Arts by Max Parfitt.

Dominic will direct Wild Arts' production of Eugene Onegin, Summer 2025.

THE LEGACY OF *MESSIAH* AND 'THE GREAT HANDEL CHORUS'

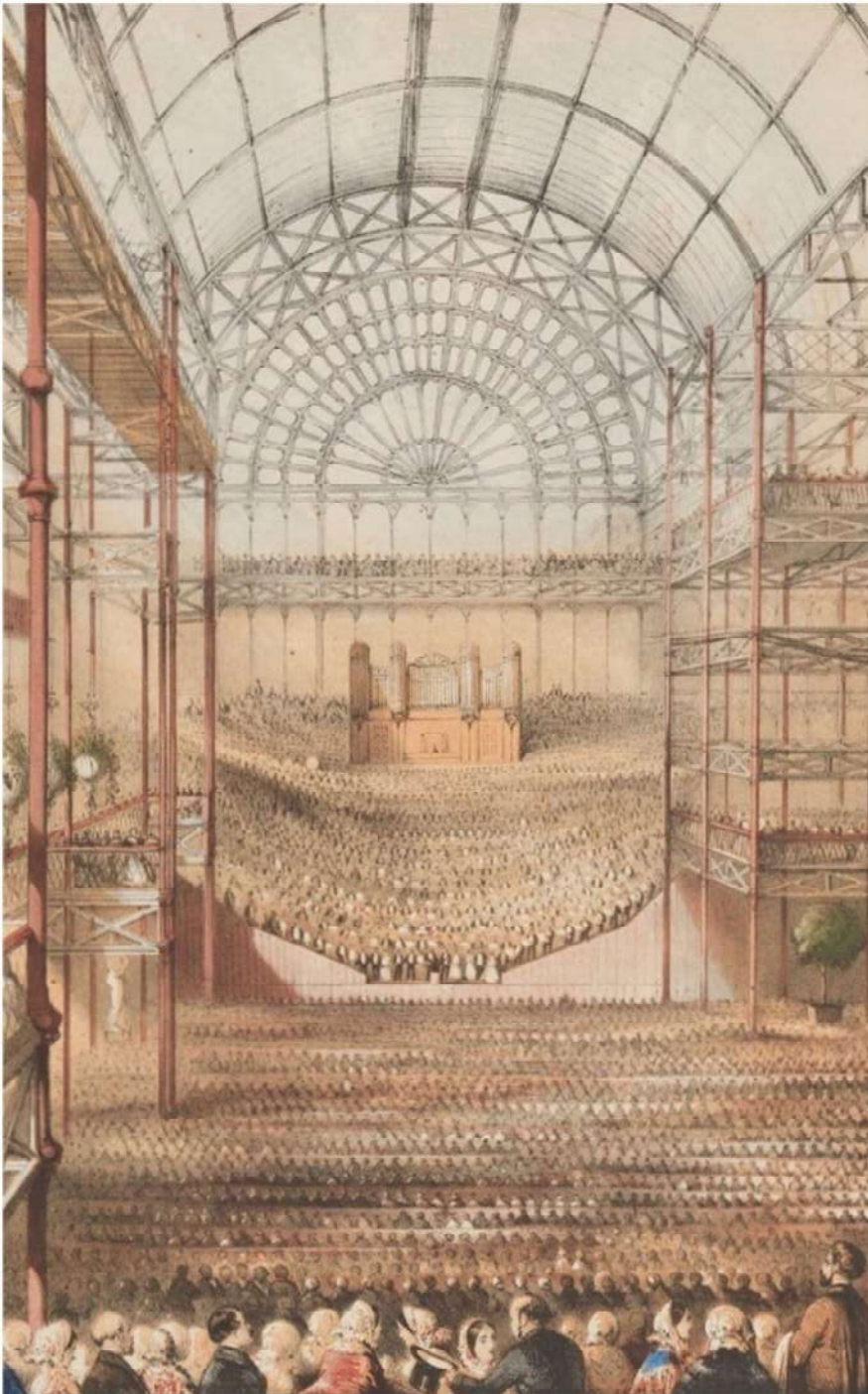
Léo Charlier

In an 1859 letter to a friend, George Eliot wrote of Handel, 'there are few things that I care for more in the way of music than his choruses performed by a grand orchestra.' His music is referenced in both her novels and correspondence in terms of veneration, with the 'great Handel chorus' in particular appearing as a metaphor for all humanity, embodying an ideal of unity.

In the century since his death, Handel's oratorios had become an essential part of the fabric of Victorian music-making. The emergence of choral societies provided a means for vast numbers of people, often members of the working classes, to take active part in performance of his oratorios, with annual 'Handel Festivals' in which hundreds of people took part. It is at one of these concerts in 1840 in Birmingham that Eliot first heard *Messiah*. By the time of the 'Great Handel Festival,' marking 100 years since the composer's death and held [in] the same year Eliot wrote her letter, there were 2765 vocal and 460 instrumental performers. The exponential rise in scale continued well into the 20th century, culminating in numbers of around 4000 by the 1920s. In light of such numbers, a comment made by Eliot in 1871 on 'the sublime effect of the Handel choruses and the total futility of the solos,' seems unsurprising. Handel's music had come to be seen as the embodiment of a maximalist aesthetic.

From the 1960s onwards, however, scholarship began to offer an alternative conception of how the works should be performed. The gargantuan scale of massed performances (what musicologist Carl Dahlhaus described as Handel's 'monumentality'), was deemed 'inauthentic,' or even a perversion of the music itself. These renditions were bogged down by slow tempi and a bloated orchestra of modern instruments. Indeed, such large performances required significant adaptation and relied on arrangements, for example by Mozart, who filled out the orchestration and added new parts.

Increasingly ensembles were keen to recreate a sound closer to Handel's original practice. They started performing on period instruments, with reduced numbers of musicians, adopted faster tempi, and returned to improvised ornamentation. But how were such vastly different interpretations of the same piece able to emerge?



'The Handel Festival at the Crystal Palace,' by John Brandard, printed by M. & N. Hanhart, published by Chappell & Co. (chromolithograph, 1859). Reproduced by kind permission of the National Portrait Gallery.

Messiah occupies a space between the sacred and secular, the dramatic and restrained, the popular and personal. The libretto by Charles Jennens thematically groups texts from scripture and places them within a dramatic context: Part 1 features the prophecy of Jesus' birth, Part 2 his sacrifice and death, and Part 3 his resurrection. It draws together the theatrical – associated with extravagance and iniquity – and the sacred.

To some critics at the time, this was borderline sacrilegious, and the complaints continued as, after Handel's death, the work was increasingly brought from the theatre to consecrated churches. If the pious were disorientated, so too were the proponents of drama. In a departure from the usual practices of the oratorio, the work is low on narrative content and directly represented action, the movements forming something closer to a series of reflective vignettes or a meditative fresco.

Handel's foregrounding of the chorus typifies this unique structure; it is not merely a 'crowd' but takes on a central role in the expression of personal devotion. Texts such as "For unto us a child is born," "Surely He hath borne our griefs," or God "hath redeemed us," use personal pronouns to suggest a strong sense of belonging – a chorus directly involving themselves in the story. The central character, by comparison, is entirely absent; at no point does Jesus appear or speak, yet he is everywhere in the impact of his story on the people. Rather than relating narrative events, which in any case would be known to all, the work dwells on Jesus as a concept and an ideal – the final Hallelujah chorus enacting the jubilation of divine inspiration through the dissolution of language into a series of exclamations of joy. A work such as this is neither wholly dramatic nor wholly religious: it revels in the in between.

Initially reception was divided – following the immensely successful premiere in Dublin, the first London run would close after only three shows – and yet by Eliot's time, society had found a place for

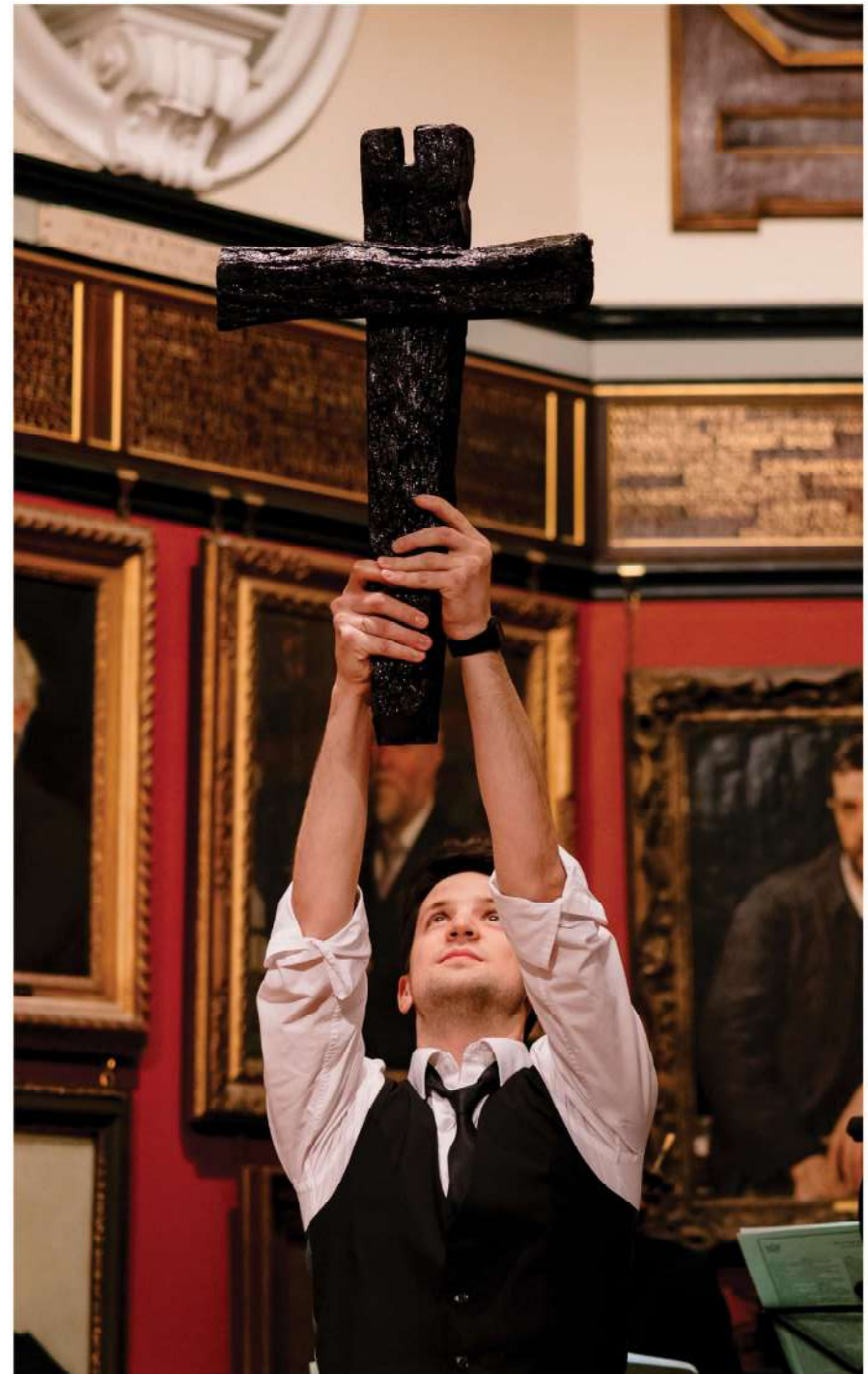
Messiah within a movement for social improvement. Rather than corrupting religion with populism and entertainment, the work became a means of moral edification for the masses. The grand festivals offered a ritual enactment of social and spiritual unity, a simultaneously personal and collective demonstration and affirmation of faith, at a scale well beyond what Handel (with a chorus of around twenty) could ever have imagined.

Messiah Today

Divergent approaches, throughout history and today, mean that there is no "right" way to perform the *Messiah*. Even in Handel's own lifetime, there was significant variation depending on the performers available and other constraints, and a certain flexibility in cuts and arrangements such that it would be impossible to enshrine a definitive version. Equally, the grand Victorian version cannot and should not be forgotten. *Messiah*'s legacy as a large-scale participatory work is perpetuated with singalong events and flashmobs every December, and, originally performed around Easter, even its association with Christmas originates from the period after Handel's death. The evolving history of *Messiah* is now an integral part of it as a shared cultural touchstone. It is a testament to Handel's skilled and sensitive vocal writing that it can be as powerful sung by one as by 1000.

Wild Arts presents *Messiah* at its most pared-back and intimate, allowing the timbre of gut strings and period winds to shine in Handel's original arrangements. The singers are given centre stage to express the immediacy of the personal meditations on the mystery of the Christ; some subtle staging brings Handel's theatrical heritage back to the story; and in doubling as both chorus and soli, the singers dissolve any sense of hierarchy. They come to embody the humanist values which have been so important throughout the centuries in the reception of this great work.

— Léo Charlier, University of Oxford



Wild Arts' *Messiah* at the Art Workers' Guild, London, 2023.

CREATIVE TEAM

TOM MORRIS Staging

Tom Morris was Artistic Director of Battersea Arts Centre from 1995-2004 and of Bristol Old Vic from 2009-2022. He has been Associate Director of the National Theatre since 2004. Work as a director includes *War Horse* (National Theatre), *Touching the Void* and *Dr Semmelweis* (Bristol Old Vic / West End), Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo* (Vienna Staatsoper), *The Death of Kinghoffer* (English National Opera / Metropolitan Opera) and Handel's *Messiah* (Bristol Proms). Writing includes *Orpheus in Hell* (English National Opera).

ORLANDO JOPLING Musical Director / Harpsichord

Orlando Jopling's conducting work ranges from guest music staff and positions at the Royal Opera House, Royal Ballet, and English National Ballet, to performing/recording with the Royal Philharmonic, English Chamber Orchestra, London Mozart Players, and Irish Chamber Orchestra, and to collaborations with theatre companies, dancers, choreographers, poets, and pop stars. He studied keyboard as a répétiteur at the National Opera Studio and Royal Academy of Music, and is Artistic Director of Wild Arts.

ROSIE KAT Associate Director

Rosie Kat trained at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama. She specialises in education and engagement work, and has directed with Northern Opera Group, Music in the Round, Leeds Youth Opera, and Citizens of the World Refugee Choir. She has worked as assistant/associate director at Opera North, Welsh National Opera, Leeds Playhouse, Opera Holland Park, Grange Festival, and the Royal Opera House.

SINGERS



CATHERINE BACKHOUSE Mezzo-Soprano

Catherine Backhouse studied at the University of Durham, Guildhall School of Music and Drama and was a Scottish Opera Emerging Artist. A founder member of the acapella group Voces8, operatic highlights include Waltraute in *Die Walküre* and *Götterdämmerung*, and Preziosilla in *La Forza del Destino* (Regent's Opera), *L'heure Espagnole* (Grange Park Opera, Mid Wales Opera), *L'italiana in Algeri* (Diva Opera), Suzuki in *Madama Butterfly* (West Green House), and Kate Julian in *Owen Wingrave* (Aldeburgh / Edinburgh International Festivals). On the concert platform, The Angel in Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius*, Verdi's *Requiem*, and Irene in *Theodora*.



GUY ELLIOTT Tenor

Guy Elliott is a tenor based in London where he studied at the Royal College of Music. He has won prizes at the Wigmore Hall Song Competition and the Copenhagen Lied-Duo Competition. Recent opera highlights include *Trouble in Tahiti / A Quiet Place* (Royal Opera House Linbury Theatre) and Raoul de St. Brionne in *The Merry Widow* (Glyndebourne), and concert highlights include Handel's *Messiah* at the Royal Albert Hall, Mozart's *Requiem* at the Stephansdom (Vienna) and Stockhausen's *Stimmung* at Barbican Hall. A keen song recitalist, Guy has performed at festivals including the Oxford International Song Festival, most recently with Roger Vignoles, and at venues including the Wigmore Hall and Snape Maltings.



LUCY HALL Soprano

Lucy Hall studied at the National Opera Studio and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. Operatic highlights include Madama Cortese *Il Viaggio a Reims*, Konstanze *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, and Mathilde *Elisabetta* (English Touring Opera), Susanna *Le Nozze di Figaro* (Scottish Opera), Jen in the award-winning *4.48 Psychosis* and Lila *The Firework Maker's Daughter* (Royal Opera House), Galatea *Acis and Galatea* (English National Opera), Sandrina *La Finta Giardiniera* (Opéra de Toulon / Grand Théâtre du Luxembourg), and Barbarina *Le Nozze di Figaro* (Festival d'Aix). In concert, she has performed with leading orchestras such as the BBC Philharmonic, BBC Symphony, Royal Philharmonic, and London Symphony Orchestra.



EDWARD HAWKINS Bass

Edward Hawkins read music at King's College, London. Having begun singing in his late twenties, he is now much in demand as a soloist across the UK and abroad. This year, Edward performed the role of Sherlock Holmes in the critically acclaimed new opera *The Sign of Four* by Liam Paterson, as well as Figaro in the GAP Festival production of *The Marriage of Figaro* and Sarastro in Wild Arts' production of *The Magic Flute*. Edward has performed various roles for English Touring Opera, including filmed staged song cycles by Shostakovich. In 2025 Edward will be performing in the world premiere of Colin Matthews' new opera *A Visit to Friends* for the Aldeburgh Festival.



MARTHA JONES Mezzo-Soprano

Martha studied at the Royal College of Music and has participated in young artist programmes at Carnegie Hall, Ravinia Festival, Britten Pears and Samling. Highlights include Nerone *The Coronation of Poppea* (English Touring Opera), Dorabella *Così fan tutte* (various including The Mozartists and Wild Arts), Annina *La Traviata* (English National Opera), Hermia *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Nevill Holt), and Fanny Price *Mansfield Park* (Grange Festival). She has sung in recital at the Wigmore Hall and orchestral song engagements include Vaughan Williams' *Serenade to Music* (Edward Gardner / Royal Festival Hall), Henze's *Stimmen* (Queen Elizabeth Hall), and Mahler's *Rückert Lieder* (New English Ballet Theatre). Recordings include *The Call* with Malcolm Martineau.



SAM MARSTON Tenor

Sam Marston most recently performed Beppe *Pagliacci* (Mid Wales Opera) and covered Tom Rakewell *The Rake's Progress* (Grange Festival), winning the 2024 Festival Prize. For the National Gilbert and Sullivan Opera Company he has performed Ralph Rackstraw *H.M.S. Pinafore*, Frederic *The Pirates of Penzance*, and Nanki-Poo *The Mikado* (Buxton Opera House). Previous engagements include Henrik Egerman *A Little Night Music* (Opera North) and *Lost and Found* (Royal Opera House / Europalia Festival). Sam studied at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, where he performed Dr Oliver Sacks *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, Hérissou *L'étoile*, and the Young Man *A Feast in Time of Plague*.



TIMOTHY NELSON Baritone

Timothy Nelson gained a degree in Physiology from Cardiff University before studying at the Royal College of Music International Opera School, where he was awarded the McCulloch Prize for Opera and won the Bruce Millar Gulliver Prize, the Joan Chissell Schumann Competition, and the Gerald Moore Award Singers Prize. He was a Jerwood Young Artist at the Glyndebourne Festival. Operatic highlights include Belcore *L'elisir d'amore* (English National Opera), Marcello *La Bohème* (Opera North), Nathan *Pleasure* (Opera North/Aldeburgh/Royal Opera House; world premiere) and Sid *Albert Herring* (Grange Festival). Future engagements include Cappelletti *I Capuleti e i Montecchi* (English Touring Opera) and the title role in *Eugene Onegin* with Wild Arts.



NATASHA PAGE Soprano

Natasha Page studied at the Royal College of Music International Opera Studio. She is a Samling Artist, an Oxford Lieder Emerging Artist, and was awarded first prize at the Maureen Lehane Vocal Awards 2023. As well as concert performances at Chichester Cathedral, Cadogan Hall, St John's Smith Square, and St Martin-in-the-Fields, Natasha's operatic highlights include Pamina *The Magic Flute* (Wild Arts), the title role in *Rita and Bianca/Gabriella La Rondine* (IfOpera), Despina *Così fan tutte* and Adele *Le Comte Ory* (Carsington Opera), Belinda *Dido and Aeneas* (Hurn Court Opera), Cleopatra *Julius Caesar* (King's Opera), cover Soprano *Medusa* (Royal Opera House), and she has covered the title role in *Semele* (Carsington and Opera de Lille).



PLAYERS

MARK BAIGENT Oboe

Mark Baigent is a regular performer with the Orchestre Revolutionnaire et Romantique, the English Baroque Soloists, the Kings Consort, La Serenissima, Instruments of Time and Truth, and Armonico Consort. He co-founded the oboe trio Pipers 3 – commissioning new works and broadcasting regularly on Classic FM, Radio 3, and Radio 4 – as well as the Denner Ensemble and Charme du Hautbois.

KATE BROOKE Double Bass

(10-12 DEC)

Kate Brooke studied at the Royal College of Music and the Royal Academy of Music. She works regularly with the leading period instrument ensembles in the UK including The Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, The Hanover Band, Brecon Baroque, The Old Street Band (English Touring Opera), Florilegium, The English Concert, Academy of Ancient Music, and the Gabrieli Consort and Players.

JONATHAN BYERS Cello

(17, 19 DEC)

A member of the Badke Quartet, Jonathan Byers has also performed as guest principal with many orchestras and period instrument groups, including the Academy of Ancient Music, Gabrieli Consort, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, and the Early Opera Company. He is co-principal cello with the English Concert and the Irish Baroque Orchestra.

SIJIE CHEN Violin / Wild Arts Ensemble Leader

Founder and Artistic Director of Vermeer Chamber Concerts, Sijie Chen was a string finalist in the BBC Young Musician of the Year Competition, and as a chamber musician has collaborated with artists including Nicola Benedetti, Roderick Williams, and Huw Watkins. Sijie is the co-leader of the London Mozart Players, and plays regularly with the Academy of Ancient Music and the Academy of St Martin in the Fields.

GEOFFREY COATES Oboe

"An excellent soloist" (*International Record Review*), Geoffrey Coates' diverse credits include the BBC Proms with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, arena tours with Tim Minchin, and guest seasons at the Royal Opera House. He has made critically acclaimed recordings of concertos by Reichenauer and Albinoni and recently performed the Mozart Oboe Concerto with The Hanover Band.

REINOUD FORD Cello

(2, 10, 11, 12 DEC)

Reinoud Ford is a soloist and chamber musician (playing in venues such as the Wigmore Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall, and Cadogan Hall), performs regularly with orchestras including the Academy of St Martin in the Fields and the English Chamber Orchestra, and has received over 15 million downloads for his collaboration with singer-songwriter Keaton Henson.

LOUISE GOODWIN Timpani

(17, 19 DEC)

Louise Goodwin studied at the Royal College of Music, where she was awarded the Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother Rosebowl by the then Prince of Wales. She is principal percussionist for the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, and performs regularly with ensembles including the London Symphony Orchestra, Academy of St Martin in the Fields, Royal Philharmonic, London Sinfonietta, and the Aurora Orchestra.

OSCAR HOLCH Viola

(19 DEC)

Oscar Holch enjoys an eclectic career as an orchestral player, chamber musician, and conductor across the UK and Europe. He appears regularly with leading modern and historical ensembles such as Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Camerata Salzburg, Les Siecles, Irish Baroque Orchestra and Balthasar Neumann Orchestra. He has worked as an assistant conductor to Sir John Eliot Gardiner and Dinis Sousa.

OONAGH LEE Oboe

(2 DEC)

Oonagh Lee studied at the Royal Academy of Music and the Koninklijk Conservatorium. She performs, records, and broadcasts with period orchestras and ensembles including The Hanover Band and the Dunedin Consort, and at the BBC Proms. Forthcoming concerts include performances with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and The Academy of Ancient Music.

TOM LEE Timpani

Tom Lee is the timpanist of the Flanders Symphony Orchestra, alongside which he enjoys a varied freelance career across the UK and Europe. Recent highlights include touring with the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, performing at the BBC Proms with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and performing with Harry Connick Jr and Diana Ross in the Residency Festival in Orlando, Florida.

SAM LEWIS Trumpet

Sam Lewis Sam enjoys a varied career which includes performances with top orchestras such as the Philharmonia and Royal Philharmonic, sessions for labels including RAM Records and UKF, and recording soundtracks including Doctor Who with BBC NOW. He has been a London Handel Festival soloist, and performs with historical ensembles Endelienta Baroque, Eboracum Baroque, and Geldart Ensemble.

MAGDALENA LOTH-HILL Violin

(2, 17 DEC)

British-Polish violinist Magdalena Loth-Hill is a founding member of the Consone Quartet – performing at prestigious venues worldwide and recording three albums. She also plays with Ensemble Hesperii, and is a regular guest with groups including Solomon's Knot, The Academy of Ancient Music, The Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, The English Concert, and Florilegium, among others.

MAXIM DEL MAR Violin

(10-12 DEC)

Maxim Del Mar is an active member of emerging chamber ensembles including Ensemble La Notte, Endelienta Baroque, Eboracum Baroque, and Liliun Convallium. He is a regular member of the Hanover Band and the London Handel Orchestra, and has also performed with Florilegium, Instruments of Time and Truth, BBC Singers, London Early Opera, and Solomon's Knot.

WILLIAM MCGAHON Violin

(7, 15, 19 DEC)

William McCahon plays regularly with some of the UK's leading historical orchestras, including Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique, the La Nuova Musica, Solomon's Knot, and The Hanover Band. He is a member of the Bloomsbury Players and the Wild Arts Ensemble, and freelances for groups including the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and Manchester Collective.

BRENDAN MUSK Trumpet

Brendan Musk is a historical trumpet player, pianist, composer, and arranger. As a trumpeter, he has performed at venues ranging from the Wigmore Hall to Pizza Express Live. As a pianist his key output is with the Lantivet Duo, arranging and performing music inspired by global folk and classical traditions.

CHRIS RAWLEY Bassoon

Chris Rawley studied at Guildhall School of Music and Drama and has since performed as guest principal bassoon with ensembles including the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, BBC Symphony Orchestra, City of London Sinfonia, the Philharmonia Orchestra, Florilegium, and The Hanover Band, as well as with the English Baroque Soloists and the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment.

JOEL RAYMOND Oboe

(17 DEC)

Joel Raymond studied at the Birmingham Conservatoire and Royal Academy of Music, before becoming joint principal oboist for the European Union Baroque Orchestra, acting as a cultural ambassador. In 2014, he led a search for the instruments used in Bach's orchestra. He has since led the Hanover Band and performed with groups including the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and the Gabrieli Consort.

GEORGE ROSS Cello

(7, 15 DEC)

Following study at the Royal Conservatory in the Hague, George Ross has worked with groups including the Hanover Band, English Concert, Academy of Ancient Music, Dunedin Consort, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, and Arcangelo. He is a member of the Consone Quartet, and recently released a CD with his father, recording Francesco Ceminiani's exuberant opus 5 sonatas for cello and continuo.

RUTH ROSS Trumpet

(17 DEC)

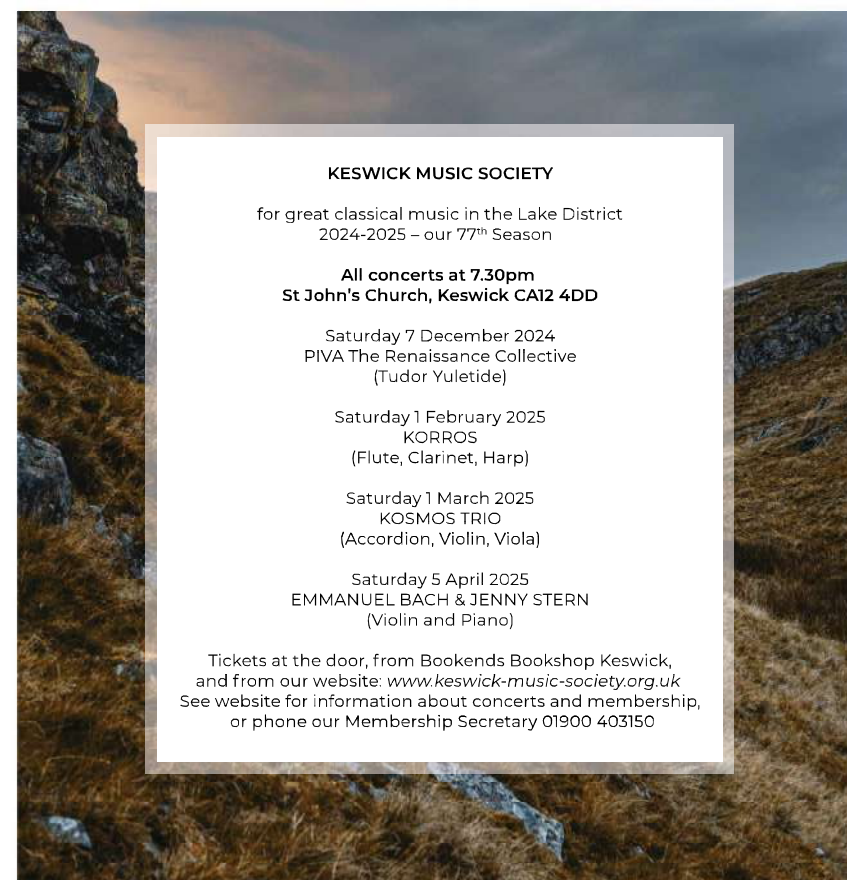
Ruth Ross studied at the Royal College of Music and the Hochschule der Künste. She has since performed with ensembles including the London Symphony Orchestra, the Royal Opera House Orchestra, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, and as principal trumpet for English Touring Opera. She held the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment's Jerwood Scholarship.

MARIANNE SCHOFIELD Double Bass

Originally from London, Marianne Schofield is a double bass player, improviser, and music arranger. She is equally at home touring the world with top UK orchestras, playing contemporary music from memory in the dark, and performing opera in gardens with Wild Arts. She is a member of two award-winning contemporary ensembles: The Hermes Experiment and Riot Ensemble.

HANNAH SHAW Viola

As a chamber musician, Hannah is a member of Eusebius Quartet, The Hague String Variations, and Trio De Kooning, appearing at festivals including Open Chamber Music, Grachten Festival, and Casalmaggiore International Festival. She has also served as guest leader with orchestras, including BBC National Orchestra of Wales, The Hague Philharmonic, and Arnhem Philharmonic.



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For more information about Wild Arts, please visit wildarts.org.uk, or contact us via info@wildarts.org.uk.

If you would like to keep in touch, you can find us on Facebook or Instagram (Wild Arts / wildartspresents), or head to our website and subscribe to our mailing list.



Wild Arts' Young Artists 2024. From left: Lachlan Craig, Eleanor Oldfield, Abbie Ward, and Henry Wright.

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Performance for Schools at Layer Marney Tower (Photo by Lucy J Toms)



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Producer, Messiah
Kirsty Hopkins

Marketing, Messiah
Bethan Sheppard

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John & Emma Stovell-Milligan
Vincent Thompson
Jane Walker
Stewart Wallace
Ian West
Jack Whinney
Geoff Whittaker

We are immensely grateful to everyone who has made this tour possible – from our supporters, Friends, and hosts, to those who have donated their space, their time, or their expertise.

A special thank you to Brian and Wendy Bolton, for managing the lights at Layer Marney Tower, and also to Nicholas and Sheila Charrington, Dave Rado, Clare Crick, Mike Connell, Zélie Jopling, Nicky Jones, Susan Wear, Tony May, Philippa Penkett, Richard Vokes, Chloe Green, and Robin Huber. Finally, to all our venues and their teams, and to everyone else who has contributed along the way.

MESSIAH 2024

Chelmsford Cathedral, Essex 2 DEC
Smith Square Hall, London 7 DEC
Hexham Abbey, Northumberland 10 DEC
Carlisle Cathedral, Cumbria 11 DEC

Lancaster Priory, Lancashire 12 DEC
Layer Marney Tower, Essex 15 DEC
Chichester Cathedral, Sussex 17 DEC
Rochester Cathedral, Kent 19 DEC

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The Bloomsbury Players, Dvořák and Rossini 28 MAR
Nathaniel Mander, *The Goldberg Variations* 23 APR
Jonathan Leibovitz, Clarinet Recital 22 MAY

SUMMER OPERA TOUR SO FAR

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MUS. VARIOUS, DIR. JAMES HURLEY

Bures, Suffolk ALL DATES TBC
Hall Barn, Beaconsfield
Oxshott, Surrey
Thorington Theatre, Suffolk
Burford, Oxfordshire
Boconnoc, Cornwall
The Minack Theatre, Cornwall
Dunster Castle, Somerset
Doddington Hall, Lincolnshire
Great Ruffins, Essex
Chestlion House, Oxfordshire
Sudeley Castle, Gloucestershire
Painswick Rococo Garden, Gloucestershire
Eastnor Castle, Herefordshire

EUGENE ONEGIN

MUS. PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY, DIR. DOMINIC DROMGOOLE

THE ELIXIR OF LOVE

MUS. GAETANO DONIZETTI, DIR. GUIDO MARTIN BRANDIS

Northern Aldborough Festival, Yorkshire 14 JUN
The Essex Summer Opera Festival,
Layer Marney Tower, Essex* 17 - 22 JUN
Kelvedon Hall, Essex* 28, 29 JUN
Forde Abbey, Somerset* 2, 3 JUL
Bletchington Park, Oxfordshire* 5, 6 JUL
Falconhurst, Kent 9 JUL
Deal Festival, Kent 10 JUL
Norwich Playhouse, Norfolk 11 JUL
Thaxted Festival, Essex 12 JUL
Childerley Hall, Cambridgeshire 20 JUL
Elveden Hall, Suffolk 25 JUL
Sherwood, Buckinghamshire 27 JUL
Owlpen Manor, Gloucestershire 31 JUL
Malvern Festival Theatre, Gloucestershire 2 AUG
Frinton-on-Sea Cricket Club, Essex 5 AUG
Thorington Theatre, Suffolk 8 AUG
Opera Holland Park, London* 14, 16 AUG
Charterhouse, London 18 SEPT

Will include a performance of both Eugene Onegin and The Elixir of Love.

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2025

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Opera Evening May – August

Tchaikovsky **Eugene Onegin** Summer

Donizetti **The Elixir of Love** Summer

The Essex Summer Opera Festival 17 – 22 June

Bletchington Park, Kelvedon Hall, Forde Abbey

& Owlpen Manor Opera Festivals June – July

Mahler Symphony no. 1 Autumn

The 25th Roman River Festival 19 – 28 September

Handel **Messiah** December

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