

## November 24, 2024 - *Messiah* Sing-Along

Program notes by J. Michael Allsen

Dive into the heart of Handel’s masterpiece at our *Messiah* Sing-Along, a unique collaboration between Arizona Philharmonic and Prescott Chorale under the baton of Dr. Edith A. Copley, the beloved and recently retired regent’s professor of Northern Arizona University’s Chorale department.

**Featured Voice Soloists are: Christine Graham, Soprano, Olga Perez Flora, Mezzo-Soprano, James Flora, Tenor and Octavio Moreno, Baritone**

*Messiah* has become a part of our musical culture to an extent that Handel, sharp businessman though he was, could never have dreamed of when he completed the oratorio over 280 years ago. There can be no doubt that *Messiah* is the work that has the widest popular appeal in the entire choral repertoire. Indeed, some of the oratorio’s numbers, particularly the famed *Hallelujah* chorus, have become virtual *clichés*, instantly recognizable when they are heard in movies or commercials. The very popularity and familiarity of *Messiah* sometimes stands in the way of our appreciation of this masterwork. For the message of *Messiah* in fact runs deeper than the hallelujahs that resound at the close of Part II: more than perhaps any other work, *Messiah* represents a sermon in music, incorporating the entire religious creed of its librettist, Charles Jennens, and its composer, George Frederick Handel. Dr. Edith A. Copley conducts this program, featuring the Prescott Chorale, singers from The Yavapai College Master Chorale and the Flagstaff Master Chorale, and soloists Christine Graham, Olga Perez Flora, James Flora, and Octavio Moreno, and YOU, if you chose to sing!

*Messiah remains the most popular oratorio—effectively, an unstaged sacred opera—of all time. Handel essentially invented this form: English texts on well-known Biblical themes with a musical form that borrows from contemporary Italian opera, placing a much greater different degree of emphasis on the chorus.*

**George Frideric Handel (1785-1759)**

*Messiah*

*Handel composed Messiah in just three weeks in early 1741. The first performance was in Dublin on April 13, 1742. Duration 82:00.*

## Handel and the Oratorio

The Handel scholar Winton Dean has appropriately described the oratorio as “...the most slippery of the larger musical forms”—“slippery” in that, before Handel, it is difficult precisely to define the form. The idea of using a large text in a multi-movement setting certainly dates back to the liturgical dramas and mystery plays of the Middle Ages, but the term “oratorio” dates only from about 150 years before *Messiah* was composed. “Oratorio” originally referred to the musical devotions of the *Congregazione dell’Oratorio*, a monastic Order founded in the late 16th century, whose services were held in the oratory of the Roman church of Santa Maria della Vallicella. The Italian and German oratorios of the 17th and early 18th centuries provided a rich historical foundation on which Handel could build. These works set a wide variety of texts, Scriptural, mythological, or allegorical—often using a mixture of recitative, aria, and chorus. However, it was Handel who achieved the musical definition of the oratorio that remains with composers to this day: an extended work for voices and orchestra, usually with a sacred text—in reality, an unstaged sacred opera—that includes movements for soloists and chorus.



When Handel moved to England permanently in 1717, it was to compose and produce operas. He was the acknowledged master of the highly stylized and pompous Italian opera that was the fashion of the time, and with the support of his aristocratic patrons and wildly enthusiastic audiences, he became the most successful impresario in the history of the form. Handel’s operas were showy affairs, featuring ornate sets and stage machinery, ballets, and highly ornamented arias by the prima donnas and castrati that dominated the London stage. However, by the late 1730s, London audiences were tiring of Italian opera, with its elaborate dramatic conventions and plots that were often incomprehensible—even for the small minority who actually understood Italian! Faced with financial ruin, Handel turned to a new form, the English oratorio. Handel’s oratorios from this period, works such as *Deborah*, *Israel in Egypt*, and *Saul*, were dramatic settings of Old Testament stories that were very familiar to his English audiences. Although Handel retained many of the outward forms of Italian opera in these works—recitative, *da capo* aria, and ensemble—he placed a much greater emphasis on the chorus. The oratorio turned out to be a stroke of financial genius. By abandoning elaborate staging, and using local soloists and choristers, rather than the temperamental and expensive Italian singers he had employed in the 1720s, Handel was able to produce these phenomenally popular new works for a fraction of the cost of his operas. Handel’s place in English musical culture was now secure. Long after his operas and instrumental works had fallen from memory, his oratorios, particularly *Messiah* of 1741, were being performed again and again.

### The first *Messiah*

In July of 1741, Charles Jennens, who had written the libretti (lyrics) for two of Handel’s

oratorios wrote the following in a letter to a friend—the earliest mention of *Messiah*:

“Handel says he will do nothing next Winter, but I hope that I shall persuade him to set another Scripture collection I have made for him, and perform it for his own Benefit in Passion week. I hope that he will lay out his whole Genius and Skill upon it, that the Composition may excell all his former Compositions, as the Subject excells every other Subject. The Subject is Messiah...”

The libretto fell into Handel’s hands at the perfect time. The composer had just made a final effort to revive comatose Italian opera, by staging two works in London. The performances were flops, and Handel, nearly broke, was giving serious thought to returning to Germany. He decided instead, however, to accept an invitation to go to Dublin, to produce a season of his new English oratorios. Handel wrote *Messiah* between August 22 and September 14 of 1741, and completed *Samson* during the next month. He set off for Ireland in November, and began what was to become an incredibly successful series of productions. Handel was able to recoup much of the money he had lost in his futile opera productions, but more importantly, his name became irrevocably tied with oratorio. This success prompted a preoccupation with the form that would last for the rest of his career, producing such works as *Belshazzar* (another collaboration with Jennens), *Judas Maccabeus*, and *Jeptha*.

*Messiah* was intended to be the grand finale of his Dublin visit, and it was performed at a benefit concert during Holy Week in 1742. The reception of this new oratorio was everything Handel could have hoped for. A public rehearsal of *Messiah* on April 6 was attended by over 600 ticketholders, who jammed into Dublin’s New Musick Hall. The stuffiness and crowding at this rehearsal caused the promoters to place a notice in the next day’s newspaper asking that ladies “...come without Hoops, as it will greatly increase the Charity by making room for more company.” According to one Dublin reviewer of this first performance:

“Words are wanting to express the exquisite Delight it afforded to the admiring crouded Audience. The Sublime, the Grand, the Tender, adapted to the most majestick and moving words, conspired to transport and charm the ravished Heart and Ear...”

### ***Messiah* after Handel**

After its success in Dublin, Handel produced dozens of performances of *Messiah*, the last one only two weeks before his death. Handel always used *Messiah* as the Holy Week finale for his annual London season, in a performance whose proceeds went to charity. (In fact, it is clear that both Jennens and Handel thought of this as a work for the penitential season of Lent. Today, *Messiah* is almost exclusively associated with the Christmas season—a much later development.)

*Messiah* took its time in crossing the English Channel. It was not until the 1770s that performances of the work were heard in Hamburg, Leipzig, Berlin, and Vienna. (Mozart himself produced a re-orchestrated, and streamlined *Messiah* in 1789.) However, *Messiah* soon became standard fare for German church choirs, and its influence can be seen in the oratorios of many later Germans, particularly Haydn and Mendelssohn. At about the same time it was being introduced in Germany, *Messiah* crossed the Atlantic to the Colonies. The first American *Messiah* was heard in Boston in 1770, and performances were soon heard in Charleston,

Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

It remained popular throughout America and most of Europe from this time onward. (Only the French were slow to accept the work—the first full French production was in 1870.) However, the celebrity of the work approached deification in England in the late 18th and 19th centuries. In 1784, George III sponsored what was to become the first Handel Festival, which featured a massive performance of *Messiah* by over 500 singers and instrumentalists. Joseph Haydn heard a festival performance of *Messiah* in May of 1791, and was profoundly moved, reportedly bursting into tears during the *Hallelujah* chorus. (Haydn's oratorios—particularly *The Creation* of 1798—were directly inspired by Handel's works, especially *Messiah*, as were the oratorios of Mendelssohn.)

This tradition of jumbo-sized performances reached its peak in the Victorian Age. A Handel Centennial performance, held in the opulent Crystal Palace in 1859, employed 2700 singers and more than 400 instrumentalists, and a London performance at the turn of the century featured a choir of more than 4000. (We can only imagine what these elephantine groups did to the sixteenth-note lines and delicate counterpoint in choruses such as *Lift Up Your Heads...*) George Bernard Shaw, always an acute observer of musical tastes, wryly proposed that Parliament make any performance of *Messiah* by more than 48 singers a capital offense!

### ***Messiah* — What to Listen For**

As in most of Handel's oratorios, the music of *Messiah* uses the forms of Italian opera in which he was so skilled. The opening *Symphony* follows the form of a French overture: a slow section with pompous dotted rhythms followed by a lively fugue. The brilliant *da capo* form that was the vehicle for operatic vocal display is retained in a few of *Messiah*'s "airs," such as *Ev'ry Valley*. *Da capo* like this are set in ABA form, with the second "A" section providing the soloist an opportunity to ornament. Most of *Messiah*'s arias, however, are set in a through-composed form, without large repeated sections, that better suits the irregular Biblical prose of its text. Arias and choruses are typically introduced by recitative, but in *Messiah*, Handel also makes frequent use of the *Arioso*, a through-composed form that was becoming increasingly popular in the mid 18th century. *Arioso* movements do not typically feature the type of vocal display heard in the more showy arias. The most important musical moments in *Messiah* are found in its choruses. While most of these are in the freely developing quasi-fugal form typical of his opera choruses (some of *Messiah*'s choruses were, in fact, written originally for Italian words and recycled into the oratorio!), the chorus takes a much larger role in developing the sense of the work's text than in any of his operas.

The text of *Messiah* is unique among Handel's oratorios. Most of them use heavily-edited versions of epic stories from the Old Testament or Classical mythology. There is a dramatic continuity in these oratorios: they tell a story, in which the soloists and chorus play clearly-defined roles. *Messiah*, however, is a patchwork of direct quotations from the English Bible. There are certainly moments of great drama in the work, but there is no "plot"—Jennens and Handel followed a somewhat more subtle plan. The oratorio is divided into three sections, which encompass the life of Christ, yet do not serve as a narration. Part I serves as a prologue: the opening dozen numbers are Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah's imminent arrival. The second half of this section turns to the story of Christ's birth and the promise of his miraculous

power. In Part II, *Messiah* alludes indirectly to the events surrounding Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. However the expressive content of this section follows a clear development: the opening is a lamentation on Christ's suffering, which moves gradually towards a joyous acclamation of his resurrection and his might that reaches its peak in the *Hallelujah* chorus. Part III, which sets texts drawn almost exclusively from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians and the Book of Revelations, is an epilogue of sorts. In closing *Messiah*, Jennens melded together these texts to form a meditation on Christ's second coming and His role in humanity's salvation.

## PROGRAM

### GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL - *Messiah*

**\* = sing-along choruses!**

#### **PART I**

- 1: Sinfonia
- 2: Tenor recitative: Comfort ye my people
- 3: Tenor aria: Ev'ry valley shall be exalted
- \*4: Chorus: And the glory of the Lord
- 5: Bass recitative: Thus saith the Lord
- 6: Alto aria: But who may abide the day of his coming?
- 8: Alto recitative: Behold, a virgin shall conceive
- 9: Alto aria and Chorus: O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion
- 10: Bass recitative: For behold, darkness shall cover the earth
- 11: Bass aria: The people that walked in darkness
- \*12: Chorus: For unto us a child is born
- 13: Pifa (Pastoral Symphony)
- 14a: Soprano recitative: There were shepherds abiding in the fields
- 14b: Soprano recitative: And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them
- 15: Soprano recitative: And the angel said unto them
- 16: Soprano recitative: And suddenly there was with the angel
- \*17: Chorus: Glory to God
- 18: Soprano aria: Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion
- 19: Alto recitative: Then shall the eyes of the blind
- 20: Alto aria: He shall feed his flock  
Soprano aria: Come unto Him
- \*21: Chorus: His yoke is easy, and his burden is light

#### **INTERMISSION**

## **PART II**

- \*22: Chorus: Behold the Lamb of God
- 23: Alto aria: He was despised
- \*24: Chorus: Surely, he hath borne our griefs
- 27: Tenor recitative: All they that see him laugh him to scorn
- \*28. Chorus: He trusted in God
- 29: Tenor recitative: Thy rebuke hath broken his heart
- 30: Tenor aria: Behold, and see if there be any sorrow
- 31: Tenor recitative: He was cut off out of the land of the living
- 32: Tenor aria: But thou didst not leave his soul in hell
- \*33: Chorus: Lift up your heads, O ye gates
- 36: Bass aria: Thou art gone up on high
- 38: Soprano aria: How beautiful are the feet
- 42: Tenor recitative: He that dwelleth in heaven
- 43: Tenor aria: Thou shalt break them

## **PART III**

- 45: Soprano aria: I know that my Redeemer liveth
- \*46: Chorus: Since by man came death
- 47: Bass recitative: Behold, I tell you a mystery
- 48: Bass aria: The trumpet shall sound
- \*44: Chorus: Hallelujah

## **CONDUCTOR**

**Dr. Edith A. Copley, Conductor** is a *regents' professor emeritus* at Northern Arizona University. During her 31-year tenure at NAU in Flagstaff, she conducted the Shrine of the Ages Choir, Chamber Singers, and University Singers, and taught courses in undergraduate and graduate conducting, secondary choral methods, and graduate choral literature. Prior to her NAU appointment, Copley taught secondary choral music for seven years in the Iowa and four years at the American International School in Vienna, Austria. Copley has received numerous honors, including the *Northern Arizona University Centennial Teacher of the Year*, *Arizona Music Educator of the Year*, *The Weston H. Noble Award* from her *alma mater*, Luther College, and most recently, the *Arizona ACDA Lifetime Achievement Award*. In retirement, she continues to be in high demand as a guest conductor, festival adjudicator, and conference clinician in the US and abroad. Copley has





conducted all-state choirs in over 30 states, national honor choirs in major concert halls in the US, and international choral festivals in Germany, the Netherlands, Japan, Luxembourg, Tasmania, England, Australia, China, Oman, Turkey, Ireland, Austria, and France. She will return to Carnegie Hall for an eighth appearance in March 2025 conducting a National Youth Choir. Copley has served the American Choral Directors Association in various leadership roles over the last 30 years and is currently ACDA National Vice-President and Conference Chair for the 2025 ACDA National Conference in Dallas.

## SOLOISTS

**Coloratura soprano Christine Graham** received a Bachelor of Music from Northern Arizona University, and a Master of Music from the University of Washington, before going on to the young artists program at the Deutsche Oper am Rhein in Düsseldorf. A native of Tucson, Arizona, she performed in Germany for nearly 20 years – the first performance being Mozart’s Mass in c Minor, and most recently as Ariel in Henry Purcell’s The Tempest. She sang roles from traditional operas, like Mozart’s Queen of the Night (The Magic Flute) or Richard Strauss’ Zerbinetta (Ariadne auf Naxos), to works of living composers, such as Peter Eötvös’ Love and Other Demons in Bremerhaven and Helmut Lachenmann’s Das Mädchen mit den Schwefelhölzern in Frankfurt, gaining her a reputation as an excellent interpreter of 20th and 21st century music.



Her extensive concert experiences include Orff’s Carmina Burana, Handel’s Judas Maccabaeus, Mozart’s Requiem and C-Minor Mass, Mendelssohn’s Elijah and Bach’s B-minor Mass. She was a two-time winner of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions at the district level, and winner of the Northwest Region. She returned to Arizona to join the voice faculty at NAU in the Spring semester of 2016, and since then has appeared in solo recitals, as a guest artist of the NAU Lyric Theatre and Ensemble Flageolet, as well as the NAU Chamber Orchestra and Flagstaff Symphony.

**Cuban-American mezzo-soprano, Olga Perez Flora**, was most recently featured in the opera Frida by Rodriguez with Opera Southwest as the fiery Lupe Rivera. She has performed with opera companies and symphonies across the country and internationally and is best known for her sultry Carmen, which she has performed numerous times, including her debut with Amarillo Opera. Upcoming performance highlights include the title role of Carmen in Carmen with Opera Southwest, mezzo-soprano soloist in the Verdi Requiem in Rome, Italy with Performance International, and the Brahms Liebeslieder Waltzes



with Chatter. Dr. Flora was featured in Michael Ching's Completing the Picture (November 2020 release) which was recorded and filmed remotely during the pandemic, for Opera Company Middlebury.

Opera roles include performances with Opera Company Middlebury/A Streetcar Named Desire (Eunice), Opera Columbus/Madama Butterfly (Suzuki), Erie Chamber Orchestra/Die Zauberflöte (Third Lady), Arizona Opera/La Cenerentola (Tisbe), Opera in the Heights/Don Giovanni (Zerlina), Opera Company Middlebury/Eugene Onegin (Olga), Northeast Symphony/La Traviata (Flora), Amhurst Orchestra/Carmen (Carmen), New Jersey Opera Theater/Gianni Schicci (Zita), Lyric Opera Theater/Ariadne auf Naxos (Der Komponist) Opera Festival di Roma/Le Nozze di Figaro (Marcellina) and more.

Orchestral soloist highlights include Verdi Requiem with the Hollywood Concert Series, Mozart's Requiem, Handel's Messiah and Israel in Egypt at Disney Hall, Hayden's Lord Nelson Mass and Bach's Cantata BWV 4 with the Southeastern Ohio Symphony Orchestra, a concert in NYC with the Jupiter Chamber Symphony Players in Alkan's Marcia funebre morte d'un pappagallo, and a New Year's Eve performance with the North State Symphony. Recent performances include concerts featuring her as the mezzo-soprano soloist in Beethoven's 9th symphony with the University of Redlands, West Side Story highlights with the Reno Philharmonic, and a concert with Cuban composer Leo Brouwer from Havana, Cuba.

Internationally known as a recitalist, Dr. Flora has performed several recitals with companies across the United States, Cuba, and in Italy. She has most recently created a Cuban Song Recital named Canciones de mi Isla: Songs from my Island, featuring Cuban composers, poets and collaborators that has been enthusiastically received by audiences. In the Spring of 2019, Dr. Flora travelled to Havana, Cuba to perform in two concerts with Cuban composers José María Vitier and Leo Brouwer in her first visit to her families' homeland.

Dr. Flora is currently an Assistant Professor of Voice and Head of Voice at the University of New Mexico and the Artistic Director of the Gobbi Villa summer young artist program in Rome, Italy. More information at [olgaperezflora.com](http://olgaperezflora.com)

**American tenor James Flora**, hailed for his "resonant, impeccably-trained voice and fearlessness to his singing", has received acclaim in repertoire ranging from Verdi and Wagner to works by Carlisle Floyd and Daron Hagen where he sang Louis Sullivan from Hagen's Shining Brow at Frank Lloyd Wright's 20th century masterpiece: Fallingwater. James has sung with the Metropolitan Opera Chorus under Maestro Donald Palumbo in their most recent productions of Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg and Fidelio. He made his Pittsburgh Opera debut as Fenton in Falstaff, and has





since returned for seven productions, including Carmen, Turandot, Lucia di Lammermoor, and most recently as 2nd Jew alongside the Salome of Patricia Racette. James has performed leading roles in opera companies across the United States, including Alfredo (La Traviata), Tamino (The Magic Flute), Pinkerton (Madama Butterfly), Rodolfo (La Bohème), Don José (Carmen), appearing with companies including Washington Concert Opera, Arizona Opera, Glimmerglass Opera, Opera Company Middlebury, Opera Columbus and others. Equally at home on the symphonic stage, he has sung with the Pittsburgh Symphony, Reno Philharmonic, Erie Chamber Orchestra, and Buffalo Philharmonic, and recently debuted with the La Voz Humana: Lenguajes Múltiples festival in Cuba with Maestro Leo Brouwer and guitar virtuoso Joaquin Clerch. James' recent performances include a debut as Florestan in Fidelio with Opera Company Middlebury and Indianapolis Chamber Orchestra, where he has previously been seen as Cavaradossi (Tosca) and Mitch (A Streetcar Named Desire).

This season, James will sing Mozart in Rimsky-Korskov's opera Mozart and Salieri and the tenor soloist in Mozart's Requiem with the New Mexico Philharmonic. Next, he will sing the tenor solos in Brahms's Liebeslieder Walzer with Chatter. Then, he will sing Don José in Opera Southwest's Spanish production of Carmen. Finally, he will sing the tenor solos in Verdi's Requiem in Rome with Perform International touring at The Basilica of St. Paul's on the Walls (of the Vatican).

James was a Young American Artist with Glimmerglass Opera, a Resident Artist with Pittsburgh Opera, and a Marion Roose Pullin Studio Artist with Arizona Opera where he made his operatic debut as Malcolm in Verdi's Macbeth. In 2010, James was a Richard Tucker finalist. He holds voice degrees from The Ohio State University (B.M. in Vocal Performance, Summa cum laude) and Florida State University (M.M. in Vocal Performance).

He is currently on the voice faculty of the University of New Mexico and has served on the faculties of Arizona State University, University of Nevada, Reno, Central Michigan University, Otterbein University, and Point Park University and is a member of NATS and AGMA. James has students performing on and off Broadway in productions of Hamilton, Urinetown, Shrek the Musical, and Rent and has students in Dolora Zajick's Institute for Young Dramatic Voices. He is the Co-Artistic Director and Co-Founder of Tito Gobbi Italian Summer Program on the grounds of the Gobbi Villa in Rome, Italy.

**Mexican-American baritone Octavio Moreno** received his Doctorate degree in Music by the University of Arizona. Mr. Moreno participated in the young artist program at the Academy of Vocal Arts in Philadelphia, followed by the Houston Grand Opera Studio. Mr. Moreno won first place in the Linus Lerner international opera competition in 2018, third place in the 2008 Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers and represented Mexico in the 2009 BBC Cardiff Singer of the World Competition and the 2010 Paris International competition, as well as third place in the Carlo Morelli Competition in Mexico City. Mr. Moreno Made first place in both 2001 Mariana de Gonitch competition in Cuba and 2004 Premio Ciudad Trujillo in Peru.

Mr. Moreno has participated with the Chicago Lyric Opera, New York City Opera, Houston Grand Opera, San Diego Opera, Arizona Opera, Bellas Artes Opera in Mexico City, and the

Theatre du Chatelet in Paris, France among others. Mr. Moreno premiered the role of Moncada in Zorro, Xihuitl in the second Mariachi Opera El Pasado Nunca Se Termina, and the Role of Laurentino in the first mariachi opera Cruzar la Cara de la Luna. He has also sung Marcello in La Boheme, Tonio in Pagliacci, Zurga in Les Pêcheurs de Perles, Don Alfonso in Mozart's Cosi fan Tutte, Vronsky in Anna Karenina, John Proctor in The Crucible, Germont in La Traviata followed by Malatesta in Don Pasquale, Enrico in Lucia di Lammermoor and the title role in Verdi's Rigoletto, Sourin in Tchaikovsky's The Queen of Spades, and Belcore in Donizetti's The Elixir of Love, to name just a few. Mr. Moreno made his Symphonic debut performing with the San Antonio Symphony in the 'Estancia' Ballet, singing the Baritone Solo. Future engagements include Laurentino with Kansas City Opera Carmina Burana with Tucson symphony, among others for the 2024-25 season.



## **Musicians**

### **Oboe**

Mary Simon, Principal  
Maja Dinger

### **Bassoon**

Chip King, Principal - *chair sponsored by RoJean Madsen*

### **Trumpet**

Joshua Haake, Principal  
Stephen Martin

### **Principal Timpani**

Maria Flurry, Principal Timpani - *chair sponsored by Jon & Christena Cavaletto*

### **Harpsichord**

Tigran Buniatyan, Harpsichord

### **Organ**

Andrew O'Brien, Organ

### **Violin I**

Katherine McLin, Concertmaster  
Michael DiBarry, Assistant Concertmaster

Spencer Ekenes  
Dasom Jeon

**Violin II**

Luke Hill, Principal  
Ava Wipff, Assistant Principal  
Luke Stikeleather

**Viola**

Bryn Cannon, Principal - *chair sponsored by RoJean Madsen*  
Katherine Shields, Associate Principal

**Cello**

Wesley Skinner, Principal - *chair sponsored by Barbara Metz & Mark Schufletowski*  
Charlie Pabst

**Contrabass**

Tzu-I Yang, Principal