



## **Masterpiece *Messiah***

### **George Frideric Handel**

#### **(1685 – 1759)**

#### **An economic downturn for opera – and bankruptcy for Handel**

It was 1741 and Handel's beloved opera house had gone bankrupt as public interest in opera in England faded. He was at the peak of his musical prowess, but now in debt and, not surprisingly, somewhat depressed. He wisely turned to the oratorio, in essence a sacred English opera that was not staged.

#### **Composing at high speed**

He began setting Charles Jennens' biblical libretto to music at his usual breakneck speed. Within 24 days, *Messiah* was complete. A practical reason that Handel could compose this work so quickly was that he often drew upon music composed earlier. It was often fascinating in the way he "borrowed" these notes. For example, the joyous chorus "For Unto Us A Child Is Born" was originally written for a profane, frivolous duet for two sopranos, castigating "blind Cupid" and "cruel beauty."

#### **The evolution of Handel's *Messiah***

*Messiah* is divided into three sections.

**Part I** focuses on the prophecy of the coming of a Messiah and, subsequently, Christ's Nativity.

**Part II** deals with Christ's suffering and death.

**Part III** offers an affirmation of the Christian faith and glimpses of the Revelation.

Revisions and adaptations were made many times after the first performance in Dublin in 1742, even by Handel himself. Mozart re-orchestrated the work in 1789 for the Classical period orchestra and more versions would come in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, sometimes for large choral festivals with hundreds, even thousands, of singers.

#### **A tradition was begun in San Diego**

In 2006, joined by the Bach Collegium San Diego chorus, Orchestra Nova (then known as the San Diego Chamber Orchestra) created a sensation by performing this great oratorio with the original 18<sup>th</sup> century period approach, creating an unforgettable emotional experience.

It was the first time in San Diego that a fully professional chorus and orchestra had come together to present a performance that captured much of the original aestheticism of Handel's very first concert. Audience members responded enthusiastically, and a tradition was begun

#### **Enhancing the tradition**

In 2008, a dramatic video presentation of great masterpieces of art complemented the orchestra's performance of this most famous of all oratorios, enhancing the experience even more.



**New this year!**

Spanish translations of libretto will be provided at each of the concerts.

"I did think I saw all Heaven before me, and the great God himself!" **Handel**, after finishing the *Hallelujah* Chorus