

The Hexham Orpheus Choir

Conductor Glenn Davis

Handel

MESSIAH

Saturday 1st December 2007

Hexham Abbey



The Hexham Orpheus Choir

Conductor

Glenn Davis

With an invited orchestra led by

Julia Boulton

Choir rehearsal pianist

Margaret Huntington

Tonight's Soloists



Kathryn Jenkin – Soprano

We are delighted to welcome Kathryn back to Hexham having previously sung with the Orpheus Choir in our 2004 performance of *Brahms' German Requiem* and our Jubilee concert in 2005. Educated in Hertfordshire and gaining her early professional solo experience with local choirs and opera companies, Kathryn studied music, drama and education at Warwick University, where she held a Choral Scholarship for four years. Widening her experience of solo, concert and recital work Kathryn also studied on both the opera and early music courses at the Royal Academy of Music. Kathryn now enjoys a broad range of singing work both at home and abroad, encompassing every genre from early music, through opera, to musicals and films. Her oratorio career has led her to travel extensively, performing regularly in Scotland, Wales and overseas. Recent engagements include Bach's *B Minor Mass* at St. James, Piccadilly, Handel's *Dixit Dominus* at St. Martin in the Fields, Mozart's *C Minor Mass* and Beethoven's concert aria 'Ah Perfido!' in Jersey. She has appeared with soloists from the Royal

Opera House in a tribute to Verdi at the Linbury Theatre, Covent Garden, and at the Chatelet Theatre in Paris, and in Berlin, in the premiere of John Adam's opera "El Nino". Kathryn sings and records with the Royal Opera House Extra Chorus, London Voices, BBC Concert.



Nicola Beckley - Alto

Nicola read Mathematics at Warwick University and subsequently went on to study singing at the Royal College of Music on the post-graduate concert and opera courses. She has performed widely in oratorio in Britain and Europe in works ranging from Bach's passions and cantatas, Handel's oratorios *Messiah*, *Theodora*, *Jephthe* and *Judas Maccabeus* to Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, Brahms *Alto Rhapsody*, Rossini *Petite Messe Solenne*, Elgar's *Sea Pictures* and Verdi *Requiem*. She recently toured as Cherubino with Handmade Opera has appeared as Mrs Noye, (Christ Church, Oxford), Olga (Randazzo Opera), Mistress Quickly, (Handmade Opera) and as Morgan La Fey in a role created for her by the composer, Simon Whalley. She appears regularly with many leading professional ensembles including the BBC singers, European Voices, the King's Consort and the Choir of the Age of Enlightenment. She has also contributed to the film soundtracks of such blockbusters as *The Lord of the Rings*, the *Da Vinci Code* and *Pirates of the Caribbean*.



Stephen Davis- Tenor

Stephen studied with Brian Raynor-Cook at the Birmingham Conservatoire, where he was a finalist in the prestigious Canadair Choir Competition, and winner of the English Song Competition. After graduating with distinction, he studied with Jessica Cash, Pamela Cook, Ian Partridge and Andrew King. Stephen is a regular soloist with many of the leading choirs in the Midlands, most notably Ex Cathedral, the region's foremost chamber choir, and also sings with the Britten Singers and Northern Voices and broadcasts regularly on Radio 4 with BBC Manchester's Daily Service Singers. He is an accomplished singer of Bach and has performed as Evangelist in both the St. John and St. Matthew Passions on numerous occasions to considerable critical acclaim at such diverse settings as St. John's Smith Square and St. Helier Parish Church, Jersey. He was tenor soloist in the first fully staged performance of the St. John Passion at The University of Warwick. In recent months Stephen has performed Bach Passions and B Minor Mass, Dies Natalis (Finzi), Haydn Creation, Mozart Requiem,

Rossini Petit Messe, Berlioz *Childhood of Christ*, Britten's St. Nicolas, *Winter Words* and *Serenade*, Vaughan Williams' *On Wenlock Edge* and *Pilgrims Journey*, Verdi Requiem, and numerous Messiahs. Stephen also works as a choral conductor, running two choral societies, and a vocal coach to schools and choral societies.



Robert Seaton – Bass

Robert has performed with the Orpheus Choir on many occasions and we are pleased that he is able to join us again in tonight's concert. Recent performances with the choir include Faure *Requiem* and Vaughan Williams *Five Mystical Songs* earlier this year, Brahms' *German Requiem* in March 2004 and as "The Judge" in *Trial by Jury*, December 2003. Robert is well known in the North of England for performances in all the major choral works including Beethoven's *Choral Symphony*, Haydn's *Creation* and the Requiems of Mozart, Brahms and Faure, and the many choral works of Handel. He has sung Rachmaninov's *The Bells* in Russian and Bloch's *Sacred Service* in Hebrew. In the recital field his repertoire embraces Lieder and French Melodie, together with a special emphasis on British composers. His career has included recitals with the pianist Keith Swallow, appearances at the Ashington and Cambridge Festivals, a performance of Verdi's Requiem in the Crucible Theatre, Sheffield as well as Charity concerts in Devon, Cheshire, Lancashire and the North East.

The Hexham Orpheus Choir gratefully acknowledge the support of our principal sponsors for 2007 – 2008
Cogito Books, 5 St Mary's Chare Hexham Tel 01434 - 602555



Glenn Davis – Conductor

Choral music has been a major part of Glenn's life since singing in the school choir of Newcastle R.G.S. under Jack Wolstenholme. After years as a choral singer Glenn was given the chance to direct a small and highly successful madrigal group (the Tynemouth Consort) between 1974 and 1982, and has been the choral trainer and conductor of the Priory Singers Tynemouth since its formation in 1979.

In January 1998 Glenn took on the directorship of the Hexham Orpheus Choir, and since then the choir has grown from strength to strength. At the same times we have also performed in a number of joint concerts with the Priory Singers thus offering the opportunity for both choirs to combine for works requiring larger forces than either could manage individually. The result to date has been three performances: Rossini's *Stabat Mater* and Brahms' *Song of Destiny* in Hexham Abbey in 2000, *Elijah* two years later in the hall of King's School, Tynemouth Brahms' *German Requiem* in 2004, and Mozart Requiem in 2006. Over the whole period he has developed his own standards of

performance, particularly after his experience of summer schools in choral conducting at Canford with Simon Halsey and the late Simon Johnson. He is a regular member of the Association of British Choral Directors and sings with the Sinfonia Chorus.

THE HEXHAM ORPHEUS CHOIR

Sopranos

Sarah Barker
Evelyn Blenkinsop
Chris Boothroyd
Ruth Brownlee
Elspeth Christie
Janet Davies
Jill Dexter
Pip Emler
Christine Fenwick
Anne Firth
Nancy Gash
Rosemarie Herdman
Frances Hughes
Margaret Huntington
Gillian Orrell
Carolyn Ramsey
Elaine Rigg
Nuala Rose
Brenda Waton
Caroline Watson
Carrie Winger

Altos

Margaret Bainbridge
Marie Bridges
Sylvia Chainey
Pat Crompton
Sheila Dance
Elizabeth Dixon
Davina Dwyer
Alice Emerson
Val Hooker
Wendy Howe
Vivien Hubbuck
Anita Jeffries
Janette Kirton-Darling
Ellen Murphy-Clarke
Judith Murray
Pat Rose
Audrey Shiel
Janet Storrie
Catherine Stott
Rachel Ward
Susan Watson
Jean Wilks
Jennie Winter

Tenors

John Barker
John Brewster
Keith Brunton
John Boothroyd
Malcolm Chainey
Tom Frost
Tim Grew
John Guyon
Dorothy Peters
Richard Place
Peter Vasey

Basses

James Arkless
Paul Barrett
Peter Charlton
John Crawford
Robert Firth
Don Macleod
Keith Mallinson
Tony May
Owen McArdle
Esme Ryder
Jack Shiel
Alan Stephenson
Peter Stott
Bill Weatherspoon
Larry Winger

ORCHESTRA

Violins:

Julia Boulton (leader)
Dawn Allen
Jane Cuggy
Gordon Dyke
Ann-Britt Hedley
Sue Innes
Ruth Turner
Helen West

Violas

Eileen Evans
t.b.c.

Cellos

Clark Slater (solo)
Peter Wright

Double Bass

Gordon Callander

Oboes

Judith Rousseau
Imogen Ogilvie

Bassoon

Paul Judson

Trumpets

Michael Walton (solo)
David Hignett

Timpani

Paul Campbell

*Harpsichord

Michael Haynes

* (With thanks to David Murray for the loan of his Harpsichord)

MESSIAH: PROGRAMME NOTES

Its message:

Charles Jennens, Handel's librettist, was a devout country squire from the Leicester/Warwickshire border. (Even his tiled fireplace contained scenes from the Bible). Although he memorably referred to *Messiah* as an "entertainment," he designed the libretto with total seriousness. It was meant as a religious counterblast to contemporary doubts about the truth of revealed religion. The late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries saw the growth of philosophic questioning of the traditions of Christianity by "Deists", or Freethinkers who doubted that Jesus **was** the Messiah, attacked the whole notion of the Trinity, and doubted the Bible as a source of divine revelation, attacking the Old Testament in particular. By carefully selecting texts from the Old Testament that, in his view, found fulfilment in the New, Jennens hoped to answer them.

Thus, after the opening Sinfony (or overture) we find four sets of prophecies of the Messiah's coming. Each is introduced by a soloist in recitative, (the tenor, bass, contralto and bass again, in succession), developed in the next "Song" (or aria), and rounded off by a chorus. (Like London buses, the first section of *Messiah* comes in threes). At the halfway point (after *For unto us*) we clearly move to Christmas. As a young man Handel visited Rome, where it was customary for Italian shepherds to come down from the hills in December, playing primitive oboes and bagpipes. These are remembered in the short *Pifa*. (*Pifferari* were the Italian bagpipers). *He shall feed his flock* is also based on an Italian shepherds' carol. The soprano soloist and following chorus narrates the appearance of the angels to the shepherds, in almost the only directly dramatic section. After this all the text becomes indirectly allusive, rather than directly descriptive. *Rejoice greatly, He shall feed his Flock and His yoke is easy* all celebrate Jesus' birth and healing ministry on earth, but presenting it indirectly through Old, as well as New Testament texts. *Messiah* is thus almost unique in Handel's oratorio output in that the story is presented **non-dramatically**. Unlike, say, *Samson*, or *Jephtha* there are no named characters.

Part Two opens with an extended reference to Good Friday, (Handel always performed the work at Easter, not Christmas). As soon as the upward octaves of *Behold the Lamb of God* are heard it is clear that we are at the foot of the Cross, looking up at the crucified Christ, while the Alto aria (*He was despised*), the trio of choruses that follow, the Tenor recitative, subsequent chorus and succession of Tenor solos all extend the theme of Christ's suffering, death, and rejection by mankind – though not without a vital reference to the salvation which it has brought (*And with his stripes we are healed*). In three places the strings have sharply dotted rhythms to illustrate the scourging of Christ, and overall, Handel move into more and more remote keys to bring home the desolation of the Passion.

Christ then rises from the dead (*But Thou didst not leave his soul in hell*), and is then received in Heaven (*Lift up your Heads*), while the importance of what all this has brought to all mankind is underlined in the aria *Thou art gone up on high*. God's word is to be spread – "yea, even for Thine enemies." The day of Pentecost now arrives in *The Lord gave the word*, where the flood of semiquavers on "company of the preachers" shows the new Apostles speaking in tongues. They then preach the God's Word to the Gentiles in *How beautiful are the feet*. (Among Jennens' own bequests in his will was a sum for the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts). Those that resist God's word (perhaps the early Roman persecutors of Christianity, or equally, the Deists referred to earlier) are graphically illustrated in the "rage" aria *Why do the nations* and the "pagan" chorus that follows, but their defeat is assured: "He that dwelleth in heaven shall laugh them to scorn...the Lord shall have them in derision". Thus the *Hallelujah* Chorus that follows is not just a general chorus of praise but one specifically celebrating the triumph of Christ's Gospel on earth, the coming of the Millennium, in fact. ("The kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ").

While Christ's own resurrection has been briefly passed over in one earlier aria, the general hope of resurrection for **all** is the theme of the whole of Part Three. Jennens' selection of texts clearly outlines the hope of eternal life and the conquest of death and sin, won by the Messiah for us*. Many are used in the Anglican Burial Service. It is thus natural to end with a tremendous outburst of praise in *Worthy is the Lamb* and an *Amen* chorus that demonstrates the best of Handel's skill in **counterpoint, (he spent more time in writing this number than any other), to bring the work to its glorious conclusion. The introduction to *Messiah's* near-contemporary oratorio *Samson* commented: "Mr. Handel happily introduc'd here *Oratorio*.... in which the Solemnity of Church-Musick is agreeably united with the most pleasing Airs of the stage" – a judgement that fits its sister-piece most admirably.

Messiah's early history in brief:

First performed in Dublin at Easter, 1742, then introduced (with considerable controversy) to London the next year, *Messiah* has become the most performed of Handel's oratorios, and of all choral music. Nevertheless some Londoners, (though not Dubliners, apparently,) were initially outraged that sacred texts should be performed on the stage, (the Covent Garden theatre, in this case) with singing parts taken by actresses! The London premiere in 1743 seems to have caused a public controversy not unlike the fairly recent one surrounding *Jerry Springer*, the Opera. A letter to the "Universal Spectator" dated March 1743 read: "(King) David said *How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land*, but sure he would have thought it much stranger to have heard it sung in a playhouse!" It was not until 1750 that Londoners took to *Messiah* with enthusiasm, when the venue shifted to the Foundling Hospital Chapel, and the cause became a charitable one. 1,386 tickets were then sold for the performance on May 1.

During this period it is clear that the work went through many revisions. There is no definitive *Messiah* – throughout the 1740's Handel adapted existing music to suit his changing cast of singers, or rewrote entire numbers. *Their sound is gone out* was originally the middle section of the *da capo* Soprano aria *How beautiful are the feet*, which, however, was never performed thus. The text was set for Tenor in 1743, and only appeared as a chorus after 1745, as did the 4:4 version of *Rejoice greatly*, which had appeared in two earlier versions. *But who may abide* may have been set as a short recitative in 1742, while the most familiar version was only written after 1749 for the Alto castrato, Guadagni. In tonight's performance, based on Handel's in 1743, you can hear a number of rarely-performed settings: *But who may abide* as originally written for a Bass, not Alto, *And Lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them* (set as an arioso for the soprano Mrs Clive to sing), the shortened 12:8 version of *Rejoice Greatly* (sung in 1742 and '43), a Soprano alternative for *Thou art gone up on high*, the duet version of *How beautiful are the feet* leading to the rarely sung but splendid chorus *Break Forth into Joy*, and the Alto version of *If God be for us*, which the Alto/actress Susannah Cibber had sung first in Dublin.

- Handel's key scheme cleverly moves the music from sharp keys to flat ones, then back again for the final triumph in D major, the natural key for Baroque trumpets.

** Counterpoint is the art of combining two or more lines of music, often based on the same material, to make a coherent whole.