

HANDEL'S GRAND ORATORIO
SAMSON

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Graduate Singers

Soloists

Gregory Massingham - Samson

Robert Dawe - Manoah

Jillian Chatterton - Dalila, Israelitish & Philistine Woman

Erica Breuer - Micah, Philistine

Alan McKie - Harapha

Craig Weatherill - Messenger

Conductor

Jason Shute

St Peter's Cathedral
Saturday, 7th May 1994, 8.00pm

Handel's Samson - An Historical Background

When *Messiah* is performed, a lot is often made of the fact that Handel composed the work in about three weeks, credit being given to the inspirational character of the subject matter spurring the composer on in an unrelenting feat of creativity. His librettist on that occasion, the Leicestershire squire, Charles Jennens, a great Handel supporter and admirer, felt that Handel had done a bit of a rushed job (Handel had told him he would take a year over its composition) and had not really done the work justice. Be that as it may, hardly was the ink dry on the *Messiah* score (14 September 1741) when Handel faced more reams of blank paper for the composition of his next English oratorio *Samson*. Before the end of October, about par for the course, *Samson*, made up of at least half as many numbers again as *Messiah*, was completed (at that stage Handel intended it to end at the chorus "Glorious hero").

Within days, Handel was at Chester waiting for favourable winds for the crossing to Dublin, whence he had been invited by the Lord Lieutenant. This invitation he had been pleased to accept, as his star, so much in the ascendant in the London of the previous twenty years, had appeared to wane. Indeed, his lack of success with the public in his 1737 Italian opera season and its concomitant financial loss led to the breakdown of his health (a stroke lost him the use of his right arm) and it was reported that he intended to give up his profession. However, this man, endowed with a prodigious energy and resilience, endured a "cure" of unusual intensity at the baths of Aix-la-Chapelle and was soon at the keyboard again; the style of his playing, on an organ in a Flemish church, was as instantly recognisable as that of the "Great Saxon" as it had been to the younger Scarlatti, when he heard a masked Handel play at a Venice carnival in their youth.

Friederich of Prussia (later renowned as a warrior-king, flautist and composer) at that very time wrote off Handel as a has-been, old-fashioned and exhausted of inspiration. However, the reinvigorated Handel tore straight back into the world of writing and promoting Italian opera for Covent Garden, despite the fact that the public's taste was obviously changing, as witnessed by the equal failure of his competitors, the so-called "Nobility opera" at the Haymarket.

Over the next couple of years, he still could not resist composing more operas in the Italian style, the genre in which he had excelled from his youth, though it was becoming clear that a second career was developing in the genre of oratorio, using the language of his adopted country. Though still expensive to mount, considering the numbers involved, the costs did not compare with the engagement for a whole season of the leading Italian castrati, like Senesino, or the prime donne, like Cuzzoni. The availability of well-trained and experienced choral singers from the ranks of the Chapel Royal, Westminster Abbey and St. Paul's enabled Handel to explore and develop the role of the Chorus, almost entirely obscured in the operatic works of his era. Handel had encountered these choristers when he provided music for the great State occasions like the Peace of Utrecht or the coronation of George II in 1727, when a choir of thirty-six Royal choristers was augmented by a further eleven Italian artistes from the Opera, the whole "supported" by an orchestra of near a hundred players. The first delivery of the coronation anthems, including *Zadok the Priest*, though possibly a musical shambles, found Handel in congenial territory. The arrangement of these unusual resources, in a large temporary amphitheatre, was the invariable disposition of (somewhat smaller) forces at his later oratorio productions and would be announced as "as at the coronation" in the press.

Though the layout mimicked the appearance of Westminster Abbey, it must not be forgotten that the venue for these later oratorio performances was usually a Covent Garden theatre, where a backcloth, suitable to the theme of the (usually) biblical drama, would offset the performers, dressed in contemporary fashion. A heated debate took place in the press in 1742 between puritanical elements, who felt it demeaning to have biblical stories retold in such licentious surroundings as theatres, whilst more pragmatic observers felt that the impact of the stories might have beneficial effects upon a clientele which might only be seen dead in a church!

Handel may or may not have taken *Samson* with him to Dublin but he certainly did not launch his career there, as was the case with *Messiah*, preferring to give performances of some of his earlier works in the form, such as *Esther* and *Saul*. Dubliners seemed to be of the opinion that *Messiah* had been composed especially for them, with its performance linked to three charitable causes - which included the relief of those in the debtors' prison.

Despite *Messiah's* undoubted success in Dublin, Handel seemed wary of giving it immediately when back in London. Instead, he added the finishing touches to *Samson* (including "Let the bright seraphim" and the concluding chorus) and opened his season on 18 February 1743 scoring a huge success with the public. Even that arch-cynic and anti-Handelian, Horace Walpole, wrote to a friend that "Handel has set up an Oratorio against the Operas, and succeeds. He has hired all the goddesses from farces (Susannah Cibber - nee Arne and Kitty Clive) and the singers of *Roast Beef* from between the acts at both theatres, with a man with but one note in his voice, and a girl without ever a one; and so they sing, and make brave hallelujahs; and the good company encore the recitative, if it happens to have any cadence like what they call a tune." Shortly afterwards, during *Samson's* unusually long initial run, Walpole added "The Oratorios thrive abundantly - for my part, they give me an idea of heaven, where everybody is to sing whether they have voices or not." At that point, the debate in the press, referred to above, ensued; Handel, giving the first London performance of *Messiah* under the title merely of *A New Sacred Oratorio* was not encouraged by its reception (another slight stroke ensued). It received no revival for two years, again failing to please and it was not until 1750, in connection with the charity of the Foundling Hospital, that it gained acceptance. The comparison with the immediate success of *Samson*, which had revivals in most of the years up to Handel's death in 1759, is striking.

The text for *Samson* was arranged almost entirely from Milton's epic poem, *Samson Agonistes*, where the poet was able to enter into the darkened soul of the fallen hero Samson (in his memorable description, "eyeless in Gaza") because of his own loss of sight. The arranger of the libretto, Newburgh Hamilton was, like Jennens, an early subscriber to the publications of Handel's music (1725 for a score of the opera *Rondelinda*) and his first collaboration with the composer was in setting Dryden's ode *Alexander's Feast* in 1736. The earliest connection known between the composer and the works of Milton is Handel's subscription for a selection from *Paradise Lost* by Galliard in 1728 (if he had set it, we should have Handel's *Creation* not Haydn's). Handel also collaborated with Jennens in setting Milton's *L'Allegro ed Il Penseroso* (adding Jennens' own section *Il Moderato*) in 1740.

In her poem *To Mr. Handel*, described at its publication in 1755 as written "about 1742", Elizabeth Tallet alludes to *Alexander's Feast*, *Saul* and *L'Allegro*. She then suggests that Handel's powers would be equal to setting the great human tragedy of *Samson Agonistes*. If the date of her poem is correct, was she privy to the fact that Handel had already completed the work before leaving for Dublin and was she, therefore, stimulating an atmosphere of anticipation for its performance? Or, did Handel

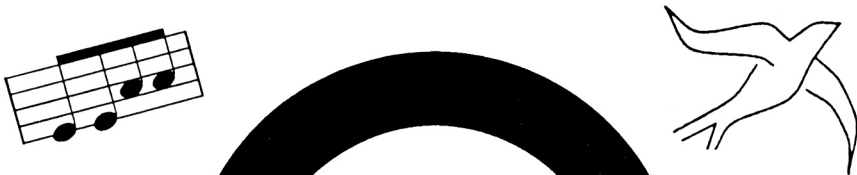
see a draft of the poem at an earlier date which, maybe, sparked off his imagination? At all events, Newburgh Hamilton asserts, in his preface to the word-book for the first performance, that it was his opinion that it would have been an irretrievable loss if Handel had not attempted a setting of the Milton poem as a musical drama.

Handel had, by this stage, established a repertory company of singers for his oratorios. His favoured tenor (who sang Samson) was John Beard, who had first sung for him as a boy in 1732 but was singing as a tenor in Handel operas by 1735. Susannah Cibber (Thomas Arne's sister) started her stage career as a mezzo-soprano, also in 1732, becoming an actress and great tragedienne after 1736. Possessed of nothing special by way of a singing voice, her delivery of "He was despised" in *Messiah* was acknowledged to be intensely moving. The part of Micah was written with her particular gifts in mind. That a male character was deliberately written for a female singer was not unusual (one of the stipulations, when agents were despatched to recruit singers on the Continent, was that the female voices should be equally good in male as well as female roles).

To complete the work, Handel decided to go beyond his original closing chorus "Glorious hero" adapted from Milton's poignant *Epitaph on the Marchioness of Winchester*, who like Milton's first two wives died in childbirth. It is given to Manoah to see the triumph beyond the tragedy, heralding the celebrated soprano aria "Let the bright seraphim" and the closing chorus. The text for both is adapted from Milton's *At a Solemn Music* (which begins with the words "Blest pair of Sirens..." made famous in Parry's setting).

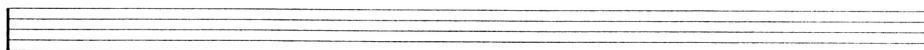
Within a decade, the musical colossus, Handel was to share Samson's and Milton's loss of sight. The oculist who attempted to restore Bach's eyesight put Handel through the same operation for cataracts - sadly the blindness appeared to be more related to his propensity for strokes - to adapt a recitative of Samson's, his condition had "immedicable grown".

Jason Shute



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Virgins

Bring the laurels, bring the bays,
Strew his hearse, and strew the ways.

Israelites

Glorious hero, may thy grave
Peace and honour ever have;
After all thy pains and woes,
Rest eternal, sweet repose.

RECITATIVE

Manoah

Come, come: no time for lamentation now!
No cause for grief; Samson like Samson fell,
Both life and death heroic. To his foes
Ruin is left; to him eternal fame.

AIR - Israelitish Woman

Let the bright Seraphim in burning row,
Their loud uplifted Angel-trumpets blow:
Let the Cherubic host, in tuneful choirs,
Touch their immortal harps with golden
wires.

CHORUS - *Israelites*

Let their celestial concerts all unite,
Ever to sound His praise in endless blaze of
light.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Jason Shute was born in "old" South Wales, though he gained his first musical experience where he was brought up on the south coast of England. At London's Royal College of Music he studied Voice (with tenor, Wilfred Brown and baritone, Redvers Llewelyn), and Violin and was awarded GRSM and ARCM diplomas, also winning the Van Someren-Godfrey prize for English Song. There followed two years of full-time training at the RCM's Opera School and the Else Mayer-Liesmann Opera Workshop.

Jason's professional operatic debut was in the 1972 Patti Festival in the diva's own theatre in her Welsh mountain castle, Craig y nos, singing Mozart's *Figaro* (alongside Australia's own Geoffrey Chard as the Count). He immediately joined the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company and performed a number of the great Gilbert & Sullivan baritone roles at Sadler's Wells and throughout Great Britain.

Since the mid '70s Jason has pursued a freelance career, embracing concert and recital work as well as opera, with appearances at some of Britain's leading festivals (such as Aldeburgh) and BBC radio and television broadcasts. His singing has taken him to Germany, Russia, Denmark and Malta.

In recent years Jason has also been in increasing demand as a conductor - an interest begun in school days. Whilst a member of the Company he conducted the D'Oyly Carte Singers, and later, went on to conduct, arrange and compose for the West Glamorgan County Youth Chamber Choir and youth orchestras. From 1984 he conducted University College Swansea's Choral Society, giving numerous first performances, and 1988, he was invited to form Neath Chorale performing the core choral repertoire. He has chorus mastered the BBC Welsh Chorus on numerous occasions since its inception in the early '80s. He has conducted two seasons for the Cadoxton Opera of *La Traviata* and *Faust*, whilst with the chamber orchestra Sinfonia Cambrensis, which he founded in 1979, he has given performances ranging from Baroque to middle Beethoven.

He made his South Australian debut last year with the Graduate Singers, of which he is Musical Director, conducting three varied programmes ranging from the early Baroque to Twentieth Century, including a premiere of his own *Summer Noels*. He also conducted a highly successful season of *Pirates of Penzance* for the Gilbert & Sullivan Society of South Australia

Gregory Massingham graduated from the Queensland Conservatorium of Music in 1974. Having been accepted as a student by the distinguished tenor Sir Peter Pears, he moved to London the following year and under Pears' direction made a detailed study of the works of Handel, Bach, Schubert and Britten. In 1976 he won a post-graduate scholarship to join the Advanced Opera Course at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, then directed by Vilem Tausky. Mr Massingham has since built a repertoire of over thirty operatic roles including Tamino(*Die Zauberflute*), Ferrando(*Così fan tutte*), Almaviva(*Il Barbiere di Siviglia*), and many Britten roles including Albert(*Albert Herring*), Lysander(*A Midsummer's Night Dream*), the Male Chorus(*The Rape of Lucretia*).

Mr Massingham returned to Australia in 1978 to join the staff of the Vocal Department at the Queensland Conservatorium of Music. In addition to his academic commitments he maintains a busy performance schedule chiefly as a concert artist. In particular his performances as the Evangelist in the Bach *Passions* and his interpretation of the works of Benjamin Britten have been highly acclaimed. He holds particular interest in contemporary music and has given the first performance of many works by Australian composers as well as the Australian premiere of works by composers such as Witold Lutoslawski, John Corigliano and Howard Blake.

Recent concert seasons have seen appearances by Mr Massingham in all the major centres of Australia; notably, performances of Bach's *Passions* in Canberra and Darwin, performances of Handel's *Messiah* in Sydney, Perth, Adelaide, Canberra and Brisbane. His 1994 Concert season includes appearances in the Sydney Symphony Orchestra's Master Musician Series, Bach's *St Matthew Passion* for the Sydney Philharmonia, Handel's *L'Allegro, Il Penseroso ed Il Moderato* at the Adelaide Festival, Stravinsky's *Puccinella* with the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra and Britten's *War Requiem* with the Queensland Youth Orchestra and the Brisbane Chorale. Mr Massingham returns to the Lyric Opera of Queensland for their 1994 season when he will sing Monsieur Triquet in the company's production of Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*.

Robert Dawe is an accomplished singer in opera, oratorio and on the concert platform. His career has spanned 35 years and concert appearances for the Australian Broadcasting Commission alone total over 150. He has also given well over 100 ABC Radio broadcasts. He is featured on several recordings including Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and Wilfred Josephs' *Hebrew Requiem* and has appeared many times on Australian National Television.

He studied singing for many years with the late Arnold Matters at the Elder Conservatorium, University of Adelaide, where he himself is now a teacher. During his student years he was awarded many scholarships, including the three year Elder Scholarship and in the competitive arena won many awards, the most coveted being the gold medal at Royal South Street, Ballarat, where he took seven first prizes and two seconds from nine entries.

Robert Dawe's numerous oratorio appearances range from Handel's *Messiah* and the Bach *Passions* to Britten's *War Requiem* and take him regularly to all Australian capital cities. He is regarded as an Elijah of distinction.

Principal roles in opera total 25 and he has performed in Adelaide, Perth, Brisbane, Hobart and Launceston.

Major concert performances have included *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* and *Kindertotenlieder* of Mahler (the former with Swedish contralto Birgit Finnila) the Sibelius *Kullervo Symphony*, and *Sea Drift* of Delius (firstly in the Sydney Opera House with Sir Charles MacKerras and as a debut performance with the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra in November 1993 in Wellington).

Robert Dawe has appeared in every Adelaide Festival, in opera, concerts or recitals, in works ranging from *The Play of Daniel* to Britten's *Curlew River* and Bach's *St Matthew Passion* to a concert performance of the Berlioz opera *Beatrice and Benedict*.

In 1989 Robert Dawe was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia in the Queen's Birthday Honours List.

In tonight's performance Robert Dawe will be performing the role of Manoah - his favourite role in this oratorio.

Jillian Chatterton is a frequent soloist with all of the major choirs in Adelaide. She has also toured with the Country Chorale Association. Last year Jillian was soloist for the Graduate Singers performing Beethoven's *Mass in C* and Mozart's *Litaniae Lauretanae* as well as contributing to the Pastoral Theme concert evening.

Jillian works frequently with the newly formed operatic group "Co-Opera". In 1993 she performed Nedda in *I Pagliacci* which was toured to country regions and performed to Adelaide audiences. This year Jillian is the First Lady in Mozart's *Magic Flute* which will be opening with a Town Hall Gala Performance in June.

Jillian studied with Arnold Matters and now receives coaching from the Australian Opera mezzo-soprano Elizabeth Campbell. Jillian has also spent time in England and Europe studying voice and opera.

Erica Breuer commenced her vocal studies with Nancy Thomas and later continued with Norma Hunter. She has been a member of the chorus of the South Australian State Opera.

In recent years she has given concerts and recitals of Lied and art song, including a programme by Russian composers, and has appeared as contralto soloist in oratorio performances of Handel's *Messiah*, Mozart's *Requiem Mass* and Bach's *St Matthew Passion*.

Alan McKie has been a frequent solo performer with the Graduate Singers and has been acknowledged with Honorary Life Membership of the choir. His lengthy experience in oratorio work has previously seen him perform in Handel's *Samson* on three occasions - once as a soloist, and twice as conductor (with the Chandos Chorale in the early 1980's).

In the last few months his musical activities have included solo roles in Haydn's *Creation*, Bach's *St Matthew Passion* and *Mass in B Minor*, in Schutz's *Christmas Oratorio* and on stage as Sir Roderick Murgatroyd with the Gilbert & Sullivan Society, as well as musical direction of a season of Strauss's *The Gipsy Baron* and (currently in preparation) Lehar's *The Merry Widow*.

Alan sings regularly with the Adelaide Chamber Singers, and also enjoys music as a listener (especially Beethoven's later string quartets). He enjoys some gentle bush walking when he can find the time.

Craig Weatherill has extensive experience in the Adelaide choral scene having sung with most of Adelaide's major choirs over the past decade. He has been a soloist previously for Adelaide Chorus, Graduate Singers and the Adelaide University Choral Society in works as diverse as Handel's *Israel in Egypt*, Mozart's *Litaniae Lauretanae* and the taxing *Cantata* of Igor Stravinsky. Craig has also sung as a chorister with Pro Canto Singers, The Corinthian Singers, Bach Choir and Adelaide Chamber Singers. Since 1987 he has been a member of the State Opera Chorus performing in such operas as the critically acclaimed *Sweeney Todd* and *Madame Butterfly*.

This year Craig performed in the Adelaide Festival for the Mark Morris Dance Company singing in all three of their Adelaide productions; *Dido and Aeneas*, *Recent Works* and *L'Allegra, Il Penseroso ed Il Moderato*. In August Craig will be singing with the State Opera Chorus in *Adriana Lecouvreur*.

Graduate Singers

The Graduate Singers were formed in 1977, and have grown steadily in number over the years. They have sung under a number of conductors, including Jonathon Draper, Carl Crossin, Hilary Weiland, Graeme Quinn, Graham Abbott and David Blight. The choir has performed many different styles of music, ranging from successful chamber concerts of music from all periods, to more ambitious presentations of great choral classics, including Bach's *Mass in B Minor* and *Magnificat*, Handel's *Dixit Dominus* and Monteverdi's *1610 Vespers*.

The Graduate Singers have performed for the ABC on many occasions and has broadcast on ABC-FM. Graduate Singers have also combined with other choirs to sing larger works, including Poulenc's *Gloria* and Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9* ("*Choral*") in the ABC Masters Series in 1989, and Britten's *War Requiem* in the ABC Choral Series in 1990. The choir has gained critical acclaim for its concerts with the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, performing Handel's *Messiah* directed by Graham Abbott in December 1990 and 1992, and Mozart's *Kyrie* and *Requiem Mass* directed by Nicholas Braithwaite in May 1991. In June 1992 the choir performed with the ASO in a Masters Series Concert which included Haydn's *Te Deum* and Kodaly's *Psalmus Hungaricus*, conducted by Janos Furst and in 1993 joined with the ASO again to perform Faure's *Requiem* with David Porcelijn. The choir recently combined forces with the Adelaide and Flinders University Choral Societies to perform Beethoven's *Mass in C* conducted by John Grundy. Performances conducted by Jason Shute in 1993 have covered a wide variety of works ranging from early Baroque to Twentieth Century.

Graduate Singers' next concert for the 1994 Subscription Series will feature Dvorak's *Mass in D* and the Kodaly *Missa Brevis*. Our final subscription offering for the 1994 Series will be the ever popular Spring from *The Seasons* by Joseph Haydn and the lesser known *Requiem* from his younger brother Michael.

GRADUATE SINGERS

Sopranos

Christine Beal
Brigid Bruer
Joan Claring-Bould
Helen Claridge
Rosemary Byron-Scott
Alison McDougall
Carol McHugh
Sue Nichols
Anna Pope
Brenda Rayner
Margaret Rawlinson
Judy Ridnell
Christabel Saddler
Rosalyn Shute
Lynne Smythe
Vicky Standish

Altos

Susan Arnold
Catriona Barr
Meran Bow
Catherine Cox
Penny Dally
Mary Doube
Lisa Hayes
Marjolijn Jones
Cathy Lock
Katrina Matthews
Sherry Proferes
Tracey Riggs
Martij Ruys
Sandra Sears
Deborah Tranter
Penny Tranter

Tenors

Richard Barrett
Andrew Mair
Timothy Muecke
Martin Penhale
Sarah Strocher
Louise Tunbridge
Craig Weatherill

Basses

Peter Ashenden
Bill Jackson
Phillip Lock
Kenneth Pope
Tim Stobie
Peter Watt
Terry Werner
Michael Wright

ORCHESTRA

Violins

Ann Axelby
Connie Beadell
Dorothy Bor
Gillian Braithwaite
Merryn Brose
Kameri Hastings
Judy Polain

Viola

Julie Webb
Tim Marks

Cello

Christopher Handley
Sherrilyn Handley

Bass

Peter Cassidy

Oboe

Bruce Stewart
Suzanne Carroll

Bassoon

Karin Dawson

Flute

Melvin Schlank
Karen Fletcher

Trumpet

Gary Mansell
Paul West

Horns

Norman Hansford

Timpani

Robert Hutchison

Organ

John Hall

Harpsichord

Jason Shute

Acknowledgements

Carclew Youth Performing Arts Centre Inc.
Accompanist: Anna Goldsworthy
Radio 5UV
Ewart Shaw
Jane Wilson
Barr Smith Library
Teresa Veith
Christ Church: Ven. J Collas
Elder Conservatorium of Music
Steffan Shute
Elen Shute
Front of House Staff:
Trudie Austin, Daryl Zeuner, Jim McHugh, Sarah Wilmot

We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of the South Australian Government
through the Department for the Arts and Cultural Development
and Hyatt Regency Adelaide

Tonight's concert has been presented by:
Graduate Singers Incorporated
PO Box 768 Unley 5061
President: Martin Penhale
Bookings and General Enquiries: Ph 331 7118