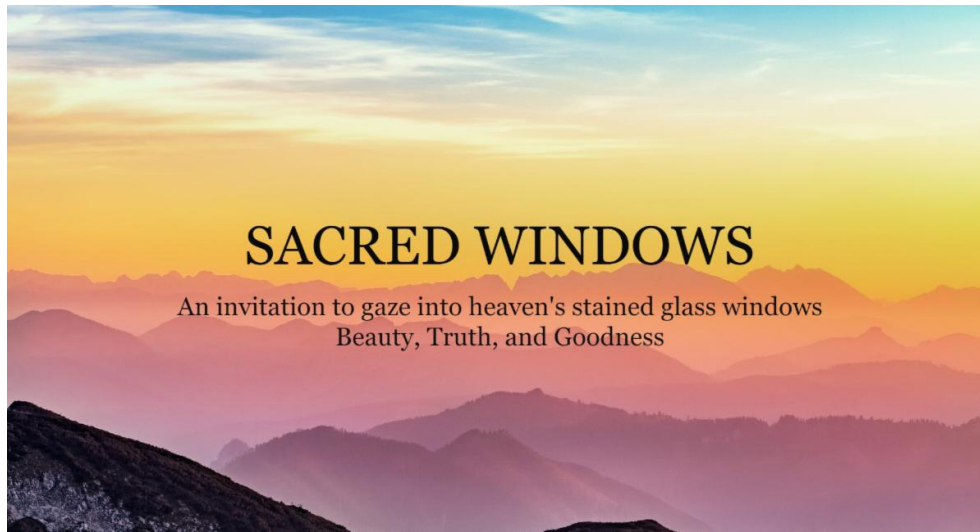

Sunday, April 18, 2021



Greetings!

If someone with the status of Ludwig von Beethoven called you "**the greatest composer who ever lived,**" you might take that as a compliment.

Beethoven *did in fact* call someone that – George Frideric Handel (1685-1759) to be precise – and the title was well-earned.

In his lifetime (74 years), Handel composed

- 42 operas,
- 25 oratorios,
- more than 120 cantatas, duets, trios, arias, odes, and sonatas,
- 18 major concerts, and
- 12 organ concertos,

making him one of the most prolific composers of history.

He even composed music in the last four years of his life **despite having gone completely blind!**

A Musical Prodigy

Handel was born in the Kingdom of Prussia, the northern region of Germany (although the country of Germany as we know it did not exist in the 18th century.)

His father, also named George, was a surgeon who wanted his son to become a lawyer. Thankfully, little George Frideric exhibited **extraordinary talent for music at a young age** and was spared from becoming a minion of the court.

He spent his formative years with the greatest musical tutors Prussia had to offer and composed his first opera at age 18.

His fellow Prussian and **contemporary, Johann Sebastian Bach**, whom Handel never met, was of a different mold. Bach lived exclusively on the patronage of the noble class requiring him to focus his talents on chamber and religious music, which was mostly instrumental.

Handel, on the other hand, focused his talents on **music for popular consumption**, such as operas and arias, and periodically created music for royalty when asked. (His famous "Water Music", for example, was written to accompany King George I as he floated down the Thames River....)

The Oratorio

His work in opera turned out to be a springboard to the form of music in which Handel later exhibited his greatest talent, **the oratorio** – essentially a religious opera. In modern parlance, we might say that here he had found his niche.

According to Marta López Fernández of the Royal College of Music in London, Handel was an unsurpassed genius **in writing for singers**. His masterpiece, the *Messiah*, makes that abundantly clear.

Handel moved to England permanently in 1712 to ply his craft in a culture where he could achieve success in music without being dependent on the patronage of the nobility. Handel was as much a businessman in selling and promoting his music as he was an artist.

How The *Messiah* Came About

Handel was already a famous composer with a successful opera company when he wrote the *Messiah*. His friend and business partner, Charles Jennens, urged him to write an oratorio about the Lord Jesus Christ based on a collection of scriptural texts he had compiled from the King James Bible.

The performance of his last opera in July of 1741 turned out to be a watershed moment for Handel's career. **He abandoned the secular opera and never went back to it.**

The following month (August 22, 1741 to be exact) he took up Jennens's challenge and **set to work on an oratorio about the Savior** of humankind.

In fact, it's utterly amazing the way he did it. Here's where we have to ask whether the composition of the *Messiah* was simply a matter of sheer talent or a work of divine inspiration:

*For the next three weeks (by most accounts, it was twenty-four days) **Handel locked himself in his home in London** and composed the entire 53-movement oratorio in an atomic burst of creative energy that produced one of the world's most beloved and memorable pieces of music.*

The entire manuscript of his handwritten music runs to 259 pages– and every word of it is scripture!

Inspiration *and* Hard Work

Imagine sequestering yourself in your home for twenty-four solid days doing nothing but eating, sleeping, and composing music in the heat of a London summer! (“Social distancing” at its finest....)

The question remains: was Handel's three-week immersion just an extraordinary feat of human talent, or was he **literally taken over by some holy, inspired spirit** that gave him the creative insight to produce such a masterpiece?

My best guess is that it was both.

First of all, Handel was known to have been an “immersion” composer, expressing a similar intensity of creative focus for short periods of time, though none quite as rapid and perfect as the *Messiah*.

But, given the subject matter, **the influence of the divine Word as his text**, and his own deep faith, it is *not hard to imagine* some bright angel leaning over his shoulder humming tunes into his ear.

Handel was born a Lutheran but was also a sincere Christian whose motivation was exactly as he wrote at the top of the final page of the composition: ***Soli Deo Gloria***, “To God alone be the glory”.

Like a hand in a glove, inspirations from heaven can work through the human actor to produce extraordinary beauty, for the glory of God and the edification of man. The music is, of course, nothing short of a masterpiece and the greatest expression of the oratorio genre.

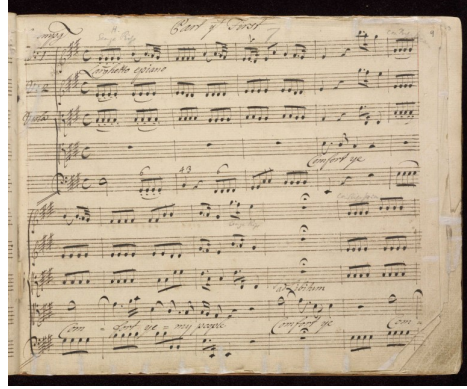
The Reception

The New Music Hall in Dublin hosted the very first performance of Handel's *Messiah* the next Easter, April 13th, 1742, and it was an instant success with the Catholic Irish. It took longer to be accepted in Protestant England for some reason.

(The image to the right is a handwritten page of an 18th century manuscript/score of the oratorio.)

It is not commonly known that Handel took not one penny of profit from the first performance but donated the proceeds to three hospitals and **secured the release of 142 men from debtor's prison.**

Ironically, Handel **intended the oratorio to be performed at Easter**, but the *Messiah* is a standard of the Christmas season in every English-speaking country and in many others around the world.



There is a story that King George II attended an early performance of the *Messiah* and **stood up when he heard the glorious Hallelujah Chorus** (creating the tradition of audience standing that endures to this day). That story is probably a legend to explain the surge of enthusiasm that audiences naturally feel whenever the climactic movement of the oratorio is performed.

Mozart himself later commented on Handel's style, saying, "*When he chooses, he strikes like a thunderbolt.*"

It's true: if you're in the audience when Handel's Hallelujah Chorus strikes, you just have to stand!

[Our Feature Articles](#)

Easter is full of joy and glory, and our Church's wondrous tradition of religious music reflects this.

Our first feature article, "History's Greatest Victory Chant – The Easter Exsultet" will astound you with the sublime beauty of the ancient hymn that is sung at every Easter Vigil in Catholic churches throughout the world. The article contains videos of both the Latin and English versions.

Handel's *Messiah* itself is the subject of **our second feature article**, "The Masterful Movements of Handel's *Messiah*", and there you can watch three clips which display the artistry of Handel's *magnum opus*.

Get ready to stand at the Hallelujah Chorus!

[Visit the Newsletter Archives](#)

Easter blessings to all!

Peter Darcy

PS – I'm happy to say that we're approaching 1000 subscribers to this email newsletter!

Please continue the work of evangelizing through Beauty-Truth-Goodness by forwarding this email newsletter to friends and family.

History's Greatest Victory Chant – The Easter Exsultet



The Masterful Movements of Handel's Messiah



An Amazing Debut!

A word of **deepest thanks** to those who have ordered my new book on angels since its launch on Easter.

I was shocked but also pleasantly surprised that *Natures of Fire* **rocketed to the top of the Amazon rankings** during Easter Week (see image below)!

If you haven't had a chance to order it yet, you can get it from Amazon with the click of a button. Also, if you do get a copy, please do me the extra favor of dropping a quick **customer review** of the book on the same Amazon page. It would be greatly appreciated.

Spread the word!

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Natures of Fire: God's Magnificent Angels Kindle Edition

by Peter Darcy (Author) Format: Kindle Edition

★★★★★ 1 rating

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Real angels have nothing to do with the images you've seen on holy cards. Their natures are so full of God's holiness that the only adequate image we have to describe them is **fire**.

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Natures of Fire will teach you:

- Nine myths about angels that you should stop believing right now;
- That angels were not created to save you from car accidents (although they do that at times);
- Why angels don't actually sing;
- The reason why there are no female angels;
- The two classes of angels that have wings (and the seven that don't);
- Why you must avoid one type of angel if you value your life;
- Angel art throughout history: the good, the bad, and the ugly.

If you wish to **download free sample chapters** of the book before buying:
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