

THE HIGH SHERIFF OF HERTFORDSHIRE'S CHARITY CONCERT

Handel's Messiah

SATURDAY 15TH JULY
2017

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THOMAS GOODE

SINCE 1827

A TRULY MEMORABLE MASTERPIECE

By **CHRIS MUHLEY**



Chris Muhley is the Chairman of the St Albans Cathedral Music Trust. Here he tells us about his own experiences of the Messiah and then more about the important role the Music Trust plays in the musical life of the Cathedral.

“How do you like your *Messiah*?” sounds like comparing different versions of a familiar tasty recipe.

The first time I conducted the whole work was as a schoolmaster at Watford Boys’ Grammar School. The tradition there, in the Spring Term, was to have a large-scale choral and orchestral work sung in the local church. Bowled over from years of listening to the 1973 EMI performance by Sir David Willcocks and King’s College, Cambridge, I needed to energise all those Watty pupils to make them want to experience this wonderful music first hand.

Perhaps I oversold it – my “ideal” performance with 30 or so singers attracted 200 in the chorus. Scouring the nation’s libraries for enough copies became almost a full-time job, let alone how to use the school’s renowned Symphony Orchestra without giving some the night off. Slightly worried about whether the slim original orchestral version could support these 200 youngsters I acquired the Mozart orchestral arrangement of 1789 with additional flutes, clarinets and horns to thicken the mixture. Our 1982 performance was in the grand style, well-seasoned but with plenty of zip! The children and parents loved it.

It was obvious really. At Hitchin Boys’ School, I had to do *Messiah* and involve the Girls’ School. More scouring of libraries – we had 300 singing this time (1993) and CLASSIC FM came and recorded it and broadcast several movements. The original orchestration was used: back to basics.

Messiah is one of those pieces everyone should have to perform at school. It should be a compulsory part of the curriculum.

At Haberdashers’ Aske’s Boys’ School I was fortunate in having a Prep School on site who I knew must have the chance to sing *Messiah*. For a lot of 7-12 year old trebles who had had little choral experience of learning all the musical dots – those endless semi-quaver runs needed every trick in the trade to get them to learn it accurately, but without boring them. Some choruses like “And he shall purify” give you very little time before you sing the first “And”. If you wait until you hear the first continuo notes you’re late. So, I taught the boys to sing “And he shall purify” every time I sang a little “deedle, deedle, dum” keyboard continuo motif. They had to sing it anywhere they heard it. In class, on the playground, wherever. Our finest lunchtime outdoor performance was in the lunch queue in 2004. Some of those now less-than-young youngsters from the 1982 performance still remember most of the treble line by heart.

And that is what *Messiah* is. A truly memorable masterpiece. The music is splendid-plus and never

fails to hit the spot. Its melodic richness of invention and rhythmic energy lifts the soul.

How do you like your *Messiah*? Prout, Watkins Shaw, Bartlett, Mozart, etc., all have their seasoned take on the same recipe. What is needed is enough of the main ingredient. Luckily, Handel left plenty of that main ingredient and that shines through any performance delivered with conviction. I'm sure you're going to have a memorable, tireless, tasty treat tonight.

To misquote Dr Johnson, "When a man is tired of *Messiah*, he is tired of life; for there is in *Messiah* all that life can afford".

The main aim of the Music Trust is to build an endowment sufficient to fund the day to day cost of St Albans Cathedral's music and support that tradition of musical excellence that has always existed in this building and community.

There is much to celebrate musically at the

Cathedral: one of the finest cathedral choirs of boys and men in the country; a girls' choir, formed in 1996, displaying the same standard; a distinctive Harrison & Harrison organ; various voluntary choirs and music groups which add further dimension to the Cathedral's worship; and a regular programme of innovative musical events and concerts.

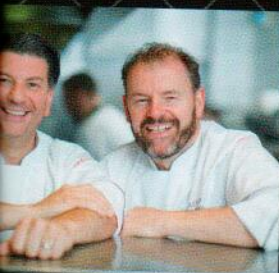
Unlike many ancient cathedrals, St Albans Cathedral has no historic endowment to support its music and the costs of the choirs and the upkeep of the organs have to be found from operating income. If you would like more information on how you can help support music at the Cathedral through the Music Trust, please contact:

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