Program Page

SPECIAL CONCERT

HANDEL'S MESSIAH

Michael Francis, *Conductor* | Yulia Van Doren, , *Soprano* | Samantha Hankey, *Mezzo-Soprano*
Michael McDermott, *Tenor* | Aleksey Bogdanov, *Baritone*
The Master Chorale Of Tampa Bay | Heather Mitchell, *Artistic Director*

Friday, Dec 5, 2025, Straz Center - Ferguson Hall at 8:00 pm
Saturday, Dec 6, 2025, Mahaffey Theater at 8:00 pm

George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)
Messiah (Oratorio in Three Parts)

PART I

1. **Sinfonia**
2. **Accompagnato** *Comfort ye, my people*
3. **Air** *Ev'ry valley*
4. **Chorus** *And the Glory of the Lord*
5. **Accompagnato** *Thus saith the Lord of Hosts*
6. **Air** *But who may abide the day of His coming*
7. **Chorus** *And He shall purify*

Recitative *Behold, a virgin shall conceive*

8. **Air and Chor** *O Thou that tellest, good tidings to Zion*
9. **Accompagnato** *For behold, darkness shall cover the earth*
10. **Air** *The people that walked in darkness*
11. **Chorus** *For unto us a Child is born*
12. **Pifa** (Sinphonia pastorale)

Recitative *There were shepherds abiding in the field*

13. **Accompagnato** *And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them*

Recitative *And the angel said unto them*

14. **Accompagnato** *And suddenly there was with the angel*
15. **Chorus** *Glory to God in the highest*

Recitative *Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened*

17. **Duet** *He shall feed His flock*
18. **Chorus** *His yoke is easy, His burthen is light*

Intermission

PART II

19. **Chorus** *Behold the Lamb of God*
20. **Air** *He was despised*
21. **Chorus** *Surely, He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows*
22. **Chorus** *And with His stripes we are healed*
23. **Chorus** *All we like sheep, have gone astray*
24. **Accompagnato** *All they that see Him, laugh Him to scorn*
25. **Chorus** *He trusted in God*
26. **Accompagnato** *Thy rebuke hath broken His heart*
27. **Arioso** *Behold, and see if there be any sorrow*
28. **Accompagnato** *He was cut off out of the land of the living*
29. **Air** *But Thou didst not leave His soul in hell*
30. **Chorus** *Lift up your heads*

34a. Air *How beautiful are the feet of them*

36. **Air** *Why do the nations so furiously rage together*
37. **Chorus** *Let us break their bonds asunder*

Recitative *He that dwelleth in heaven*

38. **Air** *Though shalt break them with a rod of iron*
39. **Chorus** *Hallelujah*

brief PAUSE and segue to Part III

PART III

40. **Air** *I know that my Redeemer liveth*
41. **Chorus** *Since by man came death*
42. **Accompagnato** *Behold I tell you a mystery*
43. **Air** *The trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be rais'd*
46. **Air** *If God be for us, who can be against us*
47. **Chorus** *Worthy is the Lamb; Amen*

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Hallelujah! It's time for another *Messiah*

Could any single piece of classical music be more popular and performed than the *Messiah?*
Yes, Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* and Pachelbel's *Canon* take in some pretty good numbers, but it's hard to avoid Handel's grand oratorio as part of our annual holiday tradition, including two performances by The Florida Orchestra and Master Chorale of Tampa Bay.

Death and taxes are two of life's guarantees, but there's a third, and it comes around every winter: Handel's *Messiah.*

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Like Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker*, Handel's matchless wonder is a cash cow for arts organizations, a challenge for performers, and much-loved by listeners. But what makes this 282-year-old work so popular?

For one thing, Handel knew how to write a good tune, and *Messiah* has gobs of them. But more than melodies, it reflects something much deeper, says TFO Music Director Michael Francis.

"For me, it's the great and complex story of the most significant book of all time, the most influential story of all time," he says. "The subject matter is huge."

Some might argue that we hear too much *Messiah* and its ubiquitous *Hallelujah* chorus. Francis says it's a mindset.

"It's important to keep coming back to great works of art because we look at them at different angles as we change, as we get older," he adds. "For that reason, it's become a deep part of our tradition. It gives structure to the narrative of our life, and I find certain movements become more moving and encouraging as time passes. Aside from that, it's a sensationally beautiful piece of music."

Messiah is an oratorio, a large-scale work based on sacred text, but without sets, costumes, or action. Drawing from the Old and New Testaments, Handel designed it in three sweeping sections: Prophecy and Fulfillment, Suffering, and Redemption. Although religious, its message remains universal, and Handel intended it for the concert hall, not the church. Its theatricality is another reason for its popularity.

Handel also wrote *Messiah* in English, rather than German or Italian, which appealed to the middle class in England and Ireland, where the work first appeared back in the mid-1700s. This also made it easy to digest in the United States, and choral societies quickly got on the *Messiah* bandwagon.

Musically, the score is a hodgepodge of styles, including Italian (recitative), French (overture), English (anthem), and German (fugal) influences. Handel was, after all, a man of the world.

He also poured his soul into composing *Messiah* at a difficult period in his life. Several of his Italian operas at the time had been duds, costing him enough to nearly be thrown into debtor's prison. So he did what any good composer would do: He locked himself in a room and pouted awhile, then began writing in a burst of white-hot inspiration. Trance-like, he finished the score in a remarkable 24 days, going for long periods without food or sleep.

After completing the *Hallelujah* chorus, he wrote that he "saw heaven before me and the great God himself." Evidence of this inspiration can be seen on the facsimile of the original score: Notes become increasingly large and spaced apart, as if written in a fury.

The full score is a handful, to say the least. It includes 53 sections spanning 2-1/2 hours. Many productions cut it down, but keep the favorites, such as *Comfort Ye My People*, *For Unto Us A Child Is Born*, and the *Hallelujah* chorus. There are so many favorites, in fact, that editing the work is more challenging than performing it in full.

This brings us to the business of standing during that famous *Hallelujah* chorus, a tradition said to have begun in 1743, when King George II rose from his seat, enthralled by the beauty of the music. Not wanting to offend the king, the audience also stood – or so the story goes.

Scholars are divided on this tale, and some say it's a myth. But if people want to stand up and sing together, that's a good thing, and Handel no doubt would give his nod of approval.

Program notes by Kurt Loft, a St. Petersburg-based freelance writer and former music critic for The Tampa Tribune.