

Handel: The Philanthropist

Start time: 7.30pm

Approximate end time: 9.40pm, including a 20-minute interval

Please note all timings are approximate and subject to change.

Programme

George Frideric Handel

Music for the Royal Fireworks

1. Overture
2. Bourrée
3. La Paix
4. La Réjouissance
5. Menuets I and II

Foundling Hospital Anthem

1. Aria: Blessed are they that considereth the poor and needy
2. Chorus: They deliver the poor that crieth
3. Aria: O God, who from the suckling's mouth
4. Chorus: The charitables shall be had in everlasting remembrance
5. Chorus: Comfort them, O Lord, when they are sick
6. Duet: The people will tell of their wisdom
7. Chorus: Hallelujah

Selection from *Solomon*

1. Overture
2. Your harps and cymbals sound
3. Praise ye the Lord
27. My sovereign liege
28. Words are weak
29. What says the other
30. Thy sentence, great king
31. Withhold
32. Can I see my infant gored?
33. Israel attend
34. Thrice blessed be the king
41. Symphony: The arrival of Queen of Sheba
58. May peace in Salem ever dwell
59. Will the sun forget to streak
53. Thrice happy king
54. Golden Columns
55. Praise the Lord

Handel was not only a great composer, he was also a man who took his social responsibilities very seriously, as this recreation of his 1749 Foundling Hospital fundraiser attests.

It was in 1749 that Handel offered to give a 'Performance of Vocal and Instrumental Musick' at the Foundling Hospital in Bloomsbury, in support of the completion of the chapel there. The Hospital for the Maintenance and Education of Exposed and Deserted Young Children had been formally established a decade earlier under a royal charter and overseen by the dogged endeavours of the philanthropist and retired sea-captain, Thomas Coram (whose name is honoured in Coram, the children's charity that continues his work today). The organisation was undergoing an ambitious new building programme, expanding its site in the region where north London bordered the countryside.

It is uncertain exactly how Handel came to be involved with the hospital; he may have been aware of the involvement of connections such as the painter William Hogarth, who contributed to the institution, or the music publisher John Walsh, who had been elected a governor there in 1748. Handel, who was already compassionate by nature, may also have been influenced by an older, more deeply embedded consideration: childhood memories of Franke's charitable foundation for children in Halle, the German city in which he was born and raised. Hogarth's connection was not merely financial; many painters donated pictures to the hospital, which became, informally, one of London's first public art galleries.

Handel made the offer of his performance on 4 May 1749 during a meeting at the Foundling Hospital. It was enthusiastically accepted, and he was invited to become a governor – but he declined on the grounds 'that he should Serve the Charity with more Pleasure in his Way, than being a Member of the Corporation'. This may have reflected a certain modesty about his public profile, of a kind that had perhaps motivated his refusal of a doctorate at Oxford in 1733. However, Handel did become a Foundling Hospital governor in 1750, for which appointment the usual fee of £50 was waived. In the same year, he staged *Messiah* there, later bequeathing to the institution a fair copy of the score; over time it would receive over £1,000 from the proceeds of his concerts there, as well as an organ that Handel donated to the chapel.

The date of the 1749 Foundling Hospital concert was postponed several times to accommodate the attendance of royalty, eventually taking place at noon on 27 May in the presence of the Prince and Princess of Wales.

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This connection was probably instrumental in securing a donation of £2,000 from the king – an eye-watering sum at the time. In addition to this, tickets were priced at half a guinea and the concert was attended by over 1,000 people, raising a large sum for the charity. The concert took place in the Foundling Hospital chapel, which was still under construction – but the absence of glass in the windows may have been welcome at a crowded event at midday in May. The Prince and Princess of Wales were joined by a gaggle of ‘young Princes and Princesses’, as well as ‘a prodigious Concourse of the Nobility and Gentry’.

Handel brought with him ‘above one Hundred Voices and Performers’ from his choirs and orchestras. The concert was modelled on the three-part format favoured in theatrical programmes of the time, and was relatively concise to fit the conventions of a matinee. The first section consisted of his *Music for the Royal Fireworks* (with its newly augmented strings but probably with reduced winds) and an *Anthem on the Peace*, a work from a recent Thanksgiving Service at the Chapel Royal. The second section (heard last in this concert) featured a selection of numbers from his oratorio *Solomon*, and the programme concluded with the *Foundling Hospital Anthem*, which opens with the text ‘Blessed are they that considereth the poor and needy’. The whole was rounded off with the ‘Hallelujah’ chorus from *Messiah* – probably still unknown to most of the audience – and it may have been at this occasion that the custom of standing during this chorus, initiated by the Prince of Wales, was established.

The *Music for the Royal Fireworks* suite had been composed by Handel little more than a month earlier for a fireworks display staged by George II at Green Park in London on 27 April 1749. The event was mounted to celebrate the end of the Austrian War of Succession and the signing of a peace treaty, hence Handel’s inclusion of movements called ‘La Paix’ (‘The Peace’) and ‘La Réjouissance’ (‘Rejoicing’) alongside more conventional Baroque dances. The memorable music was more successful than the fireworks display itself, which was dampened by rain, caused one section of a pavilion – and a lady’s gown – to catch fire, and resulted in several unfortunate injuries.

For the *Foundling Hospital Anthem* Handel recycled earlier music including material from his *Funeral Anthem for Queen Caroline*, the oratorio *Susanna* and *Messiah*. To an anonymous libretto inspired by the Old Testament’s King Solomon, Handel’s *Solomon* was composed almost exactly a year before the Foundling Hospital concert and features several celebrated numbers, including the famous ‘sinfonia’ that opens Act 3: ‘The Arrival of the Queen of Sheba’.

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Performers

Harry Bicket conductor

Ann Hallenberg Solomon

Miah Persson Queen and First Harlot

Elena Villalón Queen of Sheba

Brandon Cedel Levite

James Way Zadok

Niamh O’Sullivan Second Harlot

The English Concert

violin I

Nadja Zwiener

Jacek Kurzydło

Chloe Kim

Silvia Schweinberger

Alice Evans

Oliver Cave

violin II

Tuomo Suni

Elizabeth MacCarthy

Annie Gard

Simone Pirri

Ruiqi Ren

Sara Deborah Struntz

viola I

Alfonso Leal del Ojo

Louise Hogan

viola II

Jordan Bowron

Stephen Goist

cello

Joseph Crouch

Jonathan Byers

Alexander Rolton

Lucy Scotchmer

double bass

Hugo Abraham

Hannah Turnbull

flute

Lisa Beznosiuk

Anna Kondrashina

oboe

Shai Kribus

Bethan White

bassoon

Katrin Lazar

Sally Holman

horn

Ursula Paludan

Monberg

Martin Lawrence

trumpet

Mark Bennett

Stian Aareskjold

timpani

Alan Emslie

percussion

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Jonathan Woody

Foundling Hospital Anthem

Aria (Tenor)

Blessed are they that considereth the poor
and needy:
the Lord will deliver them in time of trouble,
the Lord preserve them and comfort them.

Chorus

They deliver the poor that crieth, the
fatherless
and him that hath none to help him.
The Lord will comfort them.

Aria (Alto)

O God, who from the suckling's mouth
ordaineth early praise,
of such as worship Thee in truth
accept the humble lays.

SATB soloists

The charitables shall be had in everlasting
remembrance
and the good will shine as the brightness of
the firmament.

Chorus

Comfort them, O Lord, when they are sick:
make thou their bed in sickness.
Keep them alive, let them be blessed upon the
earth
and not deliver them unto their foes.

Duet

The people will tell of their wisdom,
and the congregation will shew forth their
praise.
Their reward is also with the Lord,
and the care of them is with the Most High.

Chorus

Hallelujah.
The Kingdom of this world
is become the kingdom of our Lord
and of His Christ,
and He shall reign forever and ever.
Hallelujah!

Selection from *Solomon*

1. Overture

2. Chorus of Priests

Your harps and cymbals sound
To great Jehovah's praise;
Unto the Lord of hosts
Your willing voices raise.

3. Air

Levite

Praise ye the Lord for all his mercies past,
Whose truth, whose justice will for ever last.

27. Recitative

Attendant

My sovereign liege, two women stand,
And both beseech the king's command
To enter here. Dissolv'd in tears
The one a new-born infant bears;
The other, fierce, and threat'ning loud,
Declares her story to the crowd;
And thus she clamours to the throng,
'Seek we the king, he shall redress our wrong.'

Solomon

Admit them straight; for when we mount the
throne,
Our hours are all the people's, not our own.

First Harlot

Thou son of David, hear a mother's grief;
And let the voice of justice bring relief.
This little babe my womb conceiv'd,
The smiling infant I with joy receiv'd.
That woman also bore a son,
Whose vital thread was quickly spun:
One house we together kept;
But once, unhappy, as I slept,
She stole at midnight where I lay,
Bore my soft darling from my arms away,
And left her child behind, a lump of lifeless
clay:
And now – oh impious! – dares to claim
My right alone, a mother's name.

28. Trio

First Harlot

Words are weak to paint my fears;
Heart-felt anguish, starting tears,
Best shall plead a mother's cause.
To thy throne, O king, I bend,
My cause is just, be thou my friend.

Second Harlot

False is all her melting tale.

Solomon

Justice holds the lifted scale.

Second Harlot

Then be just, and fear the laws.

29. Recitative

Solomon

What says the other to th'imputed charge?
Speak in thy turn, and tell thy wrongs at large.

Second Harlot

I cannot varnish o'er my tongue.
And colour fair the face of wrong.
This babe is mine, the womb of earth
Intomb'd, conceals her little birth.
Give me my child, my smiling boy,
To cheer my breast with new-born joy.

Solomon

Hear me, women, and the king regard,
Who from his throne thus reads the just award:
Each claims alike, let both their portions share;
Divide the babe, thus each her part shall bear.
Quick, bring the faulchion, and the infant
smite,
Nor further clamour for disputed right.

30. Air

Second Harlot

Thy sentence, great king,
Is prudent and wise,
And my hopes on the wing
Quick bound for the prize.
Contented I hear,
And approve the decree;
For at least I shall tear
The lov'd infant from thee.

31. Recitative

First Harlot

Withhold, withhold the executing hand!
Reverse, O king, thy stern command.

32. Air

First Harlot

Can I see my infant gor'd
With the fierce relentless sword?
Can I see him yield his breath,
Smiling at the hand of death?
And behold the purple tides
Gushing down his tender sides?
Rather be my hopes beguil'd,
Take him all, but spare my child.

33. Accompagnato

Solomon

Israel, attend to what your king shall say:
Think not I meant the innocent to slay.
The stern decision was to trace with art,
The secret dictates of the human heart.
She who could bear the fierce decree to hear,
Nor send one sigh, nor shed one pious tear,
Must be a stranger to a mother's name —
Hence from my sight, nor urge a further claim!
But you, whose fears a parent's love attest,
Receive, and bind him to your beating breast:

To you, in justice, I the babe restore,
And may you lose him from your arms no
more.

34. Duet

First Harlot

Thrice bless'd the king, for he's good and he's
wise.
My gratitude calls streaming tears from my
eyes.

Solomon

The Lord all these virtues has giv'n,
Thy thanks be return'd all to Heav'n.
'Tis God that rewards, and will lift from the
dust
Whom to crush proud oppressors
endeavour ...

First Harlot

How happy are those who in God put their
trust!

Solomon

For His mercy endureth for ever.

41. Symphony: The arrival of Queen of Sheba

58. Recitative

Queen of Sheba

May peace in Salem ever dwell!
Illustrious Solomon, farewell!
Thy wise instructions be my future care,
Soft as the show'rs that cheer the vernal air,
Whose warmth bids ev'ry plant her sweets
disclose;
The lily wakes, and paints the op'ning rose.

59. Air

Queen of Sheba

Will the sun forget to streak
Eastern skies with amber ray,
When the dusky shades to break

53. Recitative

Zadok

Thrice happy king, to have achiev'd,
What scarce will henceforth be believ'd;
When seven times around the sphere
The sun had led the new-born year,
The temple rose, to mark thy days
With endless themes for future praise.
Our pious David wish'd in vain,
By this great act to bless his reign;
But Heav'n the monarch's hopes withstood,
For ah! his hands were stain'd with blood.

54. Air

Zadok

Golden columns, fair and bright,
Catch the mortals' ravish'd sight;
Round their sides ambitious twine
Tendrils of the clasping vine;
Cherubims stand there display'd,
O'er the ark their wings are laid:
Ev'ry object swells with state,
All is pious, all is great.

55. Double Chorus

Chorus 1

Praise the Lord with harp and tongue!
Praise Him all ye old and young,
He's in mercy ever strong.

Chorus 2

Praise the Lord through ev'ry state,
Praise Him early, praise Him late,
God alone is good and great.

Full Chorus

Let the loud Hosannahs rise,
Widely spreading through the skies,
God alone is just and wise.
He unbars the gates of day?
Then demand if Sheba's queen
E'er can banish from her thought
All the splendour she has seen,
All the knowledge thou hast taught.

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