

The 'Messiah'

Author(s): William H. Cummings

Source: *The Musical Times*, Vol. 44, No. 719 (Jan. 1, 1903), pp. 16-18

Published by: [Musical Times Publications Ltd.](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/904855>

Accessed: 05-01-2016 02:17 UTC

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



*Musical Times Publications Ltd.* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Musical Times*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

Mr. A. S. Vogt, Conductor of the Mendelssohn Choir of Toronto.  
 Mr. A. D. Tripp, Conductor of the Male Vocal Society of Toronto.  
 Dr. Ham, Mus. Doc., Oxon.  
 Mr. Humphery Anger, Mus. Bac., Oxon.  
 Mr. Edgar Birch, Conductor of the Ottawa Choral Society.  
 Mr. C. E. B. Price, Conductor of the Ottawa Amateur Orchestral Society.  
 Mr. Max Weil, Director of the Weil School of Music and Conductor of the Halifax Symphony Orchestra.  
 Mr. E. J. Chadfield, Mus. Bac., Oxon., Woodstock.  
 Dr. C. L. M. Harris, Director of the Conservatory of Music, Hamilton.  
 Mr. E. Fraser, Brandon.  
 Mr. Rhys Thomas, Winnipeg.  
 Mr. George Taylor and Mr. H. Russell, Conductor of the Arion Club, Victoria.  
 Mr. A. E. White, New Westminster.  
 Mr. F. Dyke, Vancouver.  
 Mr. G. H. Brown, Moncton.  
 Mr. James S. Ford, St. John.  
 Mr. Roselle Pocock, London Oratorio.  
 Mr. Horace Reynner, Conductor of the Oratorio Society, Montreal.  
 Mr. G. Conture and Mr. Charles Harriss.

The three gentlemen last named have undertaken to prepare the vocal forces at Montreal.'

'Do you take your own soloists, Sir Alexander?' 'Yes; they are Miss Ethel Wood (soprano), Mr. Wilfrid Virgo (tenor), and Mr. Reginald Davidson (bass), while Mr. Charles Fry will recite the lines in the "Dream of Jubal," as he did in the first performance of that work and has done many times since.'

'Have you definitely settled upon the compositions you intend to perform?' 'Yes, here is the list':—

WORKS (ENTIRELY BY BRITISH COMPOSERS) TO BE PERFORMED IN CANADA DURING APRIL, 1903.

ORCHESTRAL WORKS.

Cliffe - - - Ballade (from Symphony in C minor).  
 Corder - - - Overture, 'Prospero.'  
 Cowen - - - Scandinavian Symphony.  
 Elgar - - - Prelude and Angel's Farewell from 'Gerontius.'  
 German - - - Gipsy Suite.  
 MacCunn - - Overture, 'Land of the Mountain and the Flood.'  
 Mackenzie - - Suite, 'London day by day.'  
 Ballade, 'La Belle Dame sans Merci.'  
 Two Scottish Rhapsodies.  
 Overture, 'Cricket on the Hearth.'  
 Overture, 'Britannia.'  
 Coronation March.  
 Stanford - - Irish Rhapsody, No. 1.  
 Irish Symphony.  
 Sullivan - - Overture, 'Di Ballo.'

CHORAL WORKS.

Coleridge-Taylor - 'The Death of Minnehaha.'  
 Cowen - - - Coronation Ode.  
 Elgar - - - 'The Banner of St. George.'  
 Coronation Ode.  
 Parry - - - 'St. Cecilia's Day.'  
 'Blest pair of Sirens.'

Mackenzie - - 'The Dream of Jubal.'  
 'The Cottar's Saturday Night.'  
 Stanford - - 'The Revenge.'  
 'The Battle of the Baltic.'  
 Sullivan - - 'The Golden Legend.'

SONGS, ETC. (AMONG OTHERS).

Coleridge-Taylor - 'Onaway, awake.'  
 Mackenzie - - Three Shakespeare Sonnets for baritone.  
 Sullivan - - 'How sweet the moonlight sleeps' (duet from 'Kenilworth').  
 'Come, Margarita, come' ('Martyr of Antioch').  
 Goring-Thomas - 'Mignon.'

This selection of compositions speaks for itself. The preparation of all these works, the conducting of the concerts, and the fatigue of travelling, will make large demands upon the energies of Sir Alexander Mackenzie, but he will assuredly rise to the occasion, and it goes without saying that he will spare no pains to worthily maintain the cause of British music.

Finally, we understand that the Canadian musicians have expressed their great satisfaction at the prospect of welcoming Sir Alexander Mackenzie, and have already intimated their desire to meet him at receptions arranged for that purpose.

In wishing Sir Alexander Mackenzie *bon voyage* and all the success which so interesting an enterprise deserves, the question may naturally be asked: Will not someone in the old country show as much enthusiasm in the cause of British Music? There is plenty of scope for a Mr. Charles Harriss on this side of the water.

THE 'MESSIAH.'

BY WILLIAM H. CUMMINGS.

More than a hundred years have passed away since this magnificent work was designated Handel's 'immortal' oratorio: how truly it was so named time has proved, notwithstanding the many vicissitudes the music has had to go through. The 'Messiah' was not published during the lifetime of the composer; he only permitted it to be performed under his own personal direction, for which the manuscript copies sufficed: and although they failed accurately to represent Handel's intentions as to the details of performance, that was then of no consequence, because the composer was on the spot and able to explain and arrange all those minute modifications of notation and nuance which his ardent and artistic genius would inevitably suggest.

These personal teachings were well known to and understood by J. C. Smith, John Stanley, Handel's blind assistant, Dr. Randall, and Dr. Burney, but, unfortunately, not one of them, excepting Randall, communicated the traditions he possessed to his successors. Randall commenced his career as a chorister boy in the Chapel Royal, and was one of the original

singers in Handel's 'Esther,' in 1731; he afterwards officiated as viola-player in Handel's orchestra. He therefore was very familiar with Handel's methods and wishes, and it is of great importance to remember that the Handel traditions were personally transmitted by him to Dr. Stephen Elvey and to Dr. Crotch. Their testimony will be referred to later.

Handel died in 1759, and the score of the 'Messiah' was first published in 1767. Unfortunately, Handel's autograph manuscript is none too clear; it therefore needed an expert musician to correct the printed proofs. This evidently was not done, and the resulting serious mistakes are very numerous and greatly to be deplored. Naturally, they passed without question into the various editions of every subsequent editor and printer. The most notable edition of the 'Messiah' was that prepared by Mozart in the year 1789 for the Baron von Swieten. For the exigencies of performance, Mozart added various orchestral accompaniments: he had only the defective printed score above referred to as a guide, and as a matter of course copied the impure text. It must, however, be remembered that at the present time we are not able to determine with accuracy how much of the additional accompaniments now attributed to Mozart were actually his; certainly many of their worst features must be credited to the less-gifted head and hand of Johann Adam Hiller, Mozart's contemporary.

The only important full score for performance of the 'Messiah' published since Mozart's is that of Robert Franz, issued from the press in 1885. In his preface he alluded to the numerous imperfections and deficiencies of the Mozart edition, and assumed that he had rectified these. How signally he failed in his purpose need not further be discussed here; readers of THE MUSICAL TIMES will find the subject fully investigated by the present writer in the issue of December, 1885.

The score of the 'Messiah' just published by the German Handel Society, edited by Dr. Chrysander, is welcome as a volume for the study, but is in no sense an edition for performance, being an exact reproduction, barring numerous typographical errors, of Handel's manuscripts. That these did not fully represent the composer's intentions was well understood by Dr. Chrysander, who had prepared for publication an edition which would embody the necessary revisions for public performance.

Lovers of music, especially Handelians, have for many years entertained the hope that a committee of experts would take the 'Messiah' in hand and put forth a version of the text which should not only be accurate and reliable as regards notation and other technicalities, but should also be made available for public performances, and at the same time include and exhibit sympathetically genuine Handel traditions. The spirited enterprise of Messrs. Novello has now rendered this unnecessary. By

engaging Dr. Prout they have secured the services of the man best fitted to accomplish this most difficult and delicate task. Dr. Prout's knowledge and memory of Handel's scores, and of their individual ramifications, surpasses that of any living musician. His expert skill also qualifies him to solve with certainty any occasional knotty or doubtful point. We must not forget, however, that there are two classes of musicians, one comprising those who cry aloud for a revival in every respect of the 'Messiah' as performed under the composer himself. They would have every note and every bar exactly as they appear in Handel's manuscript, and would flatter themselves that they had then secured what they asked for. I have already shown that Handel did not write with exactitude all that he required, but obtained his wishes by personal communication with the performers. It has been well said, 'The modern system of literal exactitude, at the cost of spiritual fidelity, ignores tradition, and stiff and clumsy are the results.' Moreover, there were certain features of Handel's performances which it would be impossible to reproduce to-day. Handel had no female contraltos in his chorus, they were all *male* altos; the reverse obtains now. Handel's orchestral instruments were all (excepting the trumpet) of a coarser quality than those at present in use; his harpsichords are gone for ever; his organs with few stops and no pedals have also disappeared. The places in which he performed the 'Messiah' were mere drawing-rooms when compared with the Albert Hall, the Queen's Hall, and the Crystal Palace.

The other class of musicians comprises those who desire a pure text, with such filling-up of the harmonies as Handel intended should be so filled; they also recognise the fact that as some of the instruments used in Handel's day are no longer obtainable, their places must be judiciously supplied by the most appropriate and fitting instruments of the present time. To this class Dr. Prout's new edition will give ample satisfaction; he has not only replaced the wrong notes by the right ones, but he has also restored Handel's marks of expression, and has revised the time notation in accordance with the Handel traditions which have come down to us through Randall and Crotch. The notation is a most important matter. It is well known that composers of Handel's and of Mozart's time were not in the habit of writing double-dotted notes or double-dotted rests; when they were required they were supplied by the performers in accordance with long-established tradition. This fact is noted by Leopold Mozart, father of the composer, in his 'Violin School.'

It will be well now to make one or two comparisons of the orchestral scores of Mozart and Prout, when it will be seen that the former, who had a defective copy to work from, and, moreover, was not very familiar with Handel's works, failed in realising the nobility and perfection of Handel's composition; whereas

in the case of Prout, he had a wealth of material for reference, and a most intimate knowledge of Handel's style and manner, and could therefore bring his labours to a most successful issue.

In the Mozart score, at the end of 'Comfort ye,' we find the following passage which, though ingenious, is most un-Handelian, and worst of all almost impossible of performance:—



At the commencement of the chorus 'And He shall purify,' Mozart has for several bars left the voices wholly unsupported, although Handel's figured bass demands harmony; this Prout has supplied in a sympathetic organ part. Similar restorations will be found in later numbers of the work. All musicians remember and admire the exquisite additional accompaniments written by Mozart for the air 'The people that walked in darkness.' Beautiful though they are, it cannot be denied that they are not Handelian; Prout has therefore given the whole movement with Handel's original accompaniment, printing in a small type the Mozart additions. It is to be hoped and recommended that, as a general rule, the original version will be adhered to in public performance. In the 'Pastoral Symphony' we find the essential F sharp which belongs to the bass passage leading from the first to the second parts of the movement duly inserted in Prout's edition. Of course it is required for the modulation from C to G; but the first printed copy left it out, and so did Mozart and every editor since. We therefore recover an important sharp which has been missing for more than a century. A careful and minute inspection of Handel's autograph will show that he intended the passage as now restored. The additional accompaniments to the chorus 'All we like sheep,' to be found in the Mozart score—probably they were not his—have always seemed to me (I have heard them played many hundreds of times) like a lot of worried sheep trotting into the market-square—indeed, almost comic, and quite opposed to all Handelian tradition. These blemishes Prout has removed, and instead supplied dignified chords in consonance with the vocal parts and the figured bass.

The chorus 'He trusted in God' presents important evidence that Handel's autograph score does not contain all the instrumentation he employed in performances of the work; the manuscript gives only parts for strings and organ, whereas in the separate instrumental parts supplied by Handel to the Foundling

Hospital there are special copies for bassoons and oboes, in addition to the strings. Professor Prout has rightly incorporated these in his score; of course they do not appear in Mozart's copy. 'The trumpet shall sound' was ruthlessly cut up by Mozart; it has now been restored to its original proportions by Professor Prout.

In conclusion, a few words may be said respecting the use of trombones in the 'Messiah.' It is extremely probable that Handel, when he could get these instruments, was only too glad to be able to make use of them. It was not customary then, nor indeed long after, for composers to write the trombone parts in the score; they were written on separate sheets. We find this in the works of Haydn, Rossini, and others. The full score of Haydn's 'Creation' was published in 1800, and we find the trombone parts printed separately and bound up at the end of the volume, where they would be useless to the conductor in performance, but of course valuable to copy from for the trombonists.

It is likely, therefore, that Handel's trombone parts were either written on loose sheets, or that the players were supplied with vocal parts *especially marked*. Handel could not have had trombones in Dublin, there were none; but in London he could, if he wished, get them from the King's Band, and considering the high estimation in which Handel was held by the King, it is very probable that on occasions he would ask and receive permission to employ his Majesty's players. There is an interesting autograph of Handel's in the British Museum, in which he requests delivery to the bearer of the Large Tower Drums, he having permission to use them in his oratorio performances.

Handel was a great man with grand ideas, and approved of performances on a grand scale; but he was emphatically a man of resource. If he could not have all he wanted, he was content to make the best and most effective use of what he could get. The absence of instrumental performers or solo singers did not disconcert him. He was ready to transpose or re-write an air intended for any particular class of voice to fit it for some other wholly dissimilar; he would cut out an air and substitute a recitative, or turn a chorus into a solo; indeed, he would submit to any change in order to produce his work effectively. All these statements can be verified by an examination of the scores of the 'Messiah' which Handel wrote and used. The vitality of the 'Messiah' is wonderful. The music has been persistently incorrectly printed and performed, but in spite of this it has never failed to awaken the deepest and best emotions of the souls of those who have listened to its inspired strains; these may have been performed by a limited cathedral choir of six men and eight boys, or thundered out by the stalwart thousands at the Crystal Palace. Let us hope that the new edition just published will stimulate more patient study and more perfect performance of the masterpiece of the giant Handel.