

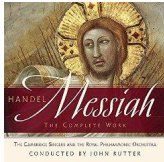
## Handel – Messiah (Rutter) (2007)

Written by bluesever

Monday, 17 April 2017 13:40 -

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Disc: 1 1. Messiah, oratorio, HWV 56: Part 1. Sinfonia 2. Messiah, oratorio, HWV 56: Part 1. Comfort Ye, My People 3. Messiah, oratorio, HWV 56: Part 1. Every Valley Shall Be Exalted 4. Messiah, oratorio, HWV 56: Part 1. And the Glory of the Lord 5. Messiah, oratorio, HWV 56: Part 1. Thus Saith the Lord 6. Messiah, oratorio, HWV 56: Part 1. But Who May Abide the Day of His Coming? 7. Messiah, oratorio, HWV 56: Part 1. And He Shall Purify 8. Messiah, oratorio, HWV 56: Part 1. Behold, a Virgin Shall Conceive 9. Messiah, oratorio, HWV 56: Part 1. O Thou That Tellest Good Tidings to Zion 10. Messiah, oratorio, HWV 56: Part 1. For Behold, Darkness Shall Cover the Earth 11. Messiah, oratorio, HWV 56: Part 1. The People That Walked in Darkness 12. Messiah, oratorio, HWV 56: Part 1. For unto Us a Child Is Born 13. Messiah, oratorio, HWV 56: Part 1. Pifa (Pastoral Symphony) 14. Messiah, oratorio, HWV 56: Part 1. There Were Shepherds Abiding in the Field / And Lo, the Angel of the Lord Came Upon Them / 15. Messiah, oratorio, HWV 56: Part 1. Glory to God 16. Messiah, oratorio, HWV 56: Part 1. Rejoice Greatly, O Daughter of Zion 17. Messiah, oratorio, HWV 56: Part 1. Then Shall the Eyes of the Blind Be Opened 18. Messiah, oratorio, HWV 56: Part 1. He Shall Feed His Flock / Come unto Him 19. Messiah, oratorio, HWV 56: Part 1. His Yoke Is Easy 20. Messiah, oratorio, HWV 56: Part 2. Behold the Lamb of God 21. Messiah, oratorio, HWV 56: Part 2. He Was Despised

Disc: 2 1. Messiah, oratorio, HWV 56: Part 2. Surely He Hath Borne Our Grievs 2. Messiah, oratorio, HWV 56: Part 2. And with His Stripes We Are Healed 3. Messiah, oratorio, HWV 56: Part 2. We Like Sheep Have Gone Astray 4. Messiah, oratorio, HWV 56: Part 2. All They That See Him Laugh Him to Scorn 5. Messiah, oratorio, HWV 56: Part 2. He Trusted in God 6. Messiah, oratorio, HWV 56: Part 2. Thy Rebuke Hath Broken His Heart 7. Messiah, oratorio, HWV 56: Part 2. Behold, and See If There Be Any Sorrow 8. Messiah, oratorio, HWV 56: Part 2. He Was Cut Off Out of the Land of the Living 9. Messiah, oratorio, HWV 56: Part 2. But Thou Didst Not Leave His Soul in Hell 10. Messiah, oratorio, HWV 56: Part 2. Lift Up Your Heads, O Ye Gates 11. Messiah, oratorio, HWV 56: Part 2. Unto Which of the Angels 12. Messiah, oratorio, HWV 56: Part 2. Let All the Angels of God Worship Him 13. Messiah, oratorio, HWV 56: Part 2. Thou Art Gone Up on High 14. Messiah, oratorio, HWV 56: Part 2. The Lord Gave the Word 15. Messiah, oratorio, HWV 56: Part 2. How Beautiful Are the Feet 16. Messiah, oratorio, HWV 56: Part 2. Their Sound Is Gone Out 17. Messiah, oratorio, HWV 56: Part 2. Why Do the Nations So Furiously Rage Together? 18. Messiah, oratorio, HWV 56: Part 2. He That Dwelleth in Heaven 19. Messiah, oratorio, HWV 56: Part 2. Thou Shalt Break Them 20. Messiah, oratorio, HWV 56: Part 2. Hallelujah 21. Messiah, oratorio, HWV 56: Part 3. I Know That My Redeemer Liveth 22. Messiah, oratorio, HWV 56: Part 3. Since by Man Came Death 23.

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*Messiah, oratorio, HWV 56: Part 3. Behold, I Tell You a Mystery* 24. *Messiah, oratorio, HWV 56: Part 3. The Trumpet Shall Sound* 25. *Messiah, oratorio, HWV 56: Part 3. Then Shall Be Brought to Pass* 26. *Messiah, oratorio, HWV 56: Part 3. O Death, Where Is Thy Sting? / But Thanks Be to God* 27. *Messiah, oratorio, HWV 56: Part 3. Worthy Is the Lamb That Was Slain / Amen*

Christopher Purves (Bass),  
Joanne Lunn (Soprano), James Gilchrist (Tenor), Melanie Marshall (Mezzo Soprano),  
Christopher Purves (Baritone), Cambridge Singers, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, John Rutter (Conductor).

The popularity of *Messiah* makes it difficult for us to comprehend that for Handel it was—to use a colloquial term—a crapshoot; it was not commissioned, nor were there guarantees for performances. It is the only truly sacred oratorio that Handel composed. It was also the only one performed during his lifetime in what Christopher Hogwood termed “a consecrated building,” and yet it was meant—in the words of its librettist, Charles Jennens—as “a fine Entertainment.”

There are any number of legends associated with the composition *Messiah*, including meals brought by Handel’s servant and later removed uneaten, of his tears mixed with ink, and the most famous being Handel’s alleged words, “I did think I did see all Heaven before me and the great God Himself!” These are fodder for a romantic novelist, but the truth is Handel applied appropriate self-discipline when dealing with the subject matter. In addition to the spartan orchestration, the opportunities for vocal display are held in check (Handel used only four *da capo* arias in the operatic style).

The state of Handel’s autograph score—including ink blots, erasures, and changes cluttering the manuscript until the very end—provides written testimony to the hurried completion of the work. Even though Handel completed *Messiah* in three weeks, there is very little evidence of him pilfering material from his other compositions. “And He shall purify,” “His yoke is easy,” “For unto us a child is born,” and “All we like sheep” are taken from Italian chamber cantatas written earlier, but for the most part, the music in *Messiah* is indigenous to the work.

Some who purchase *Messiah* are not interested in either the stories associated with it or what music Handel pinched from his other compositions; they are attracted to the music, the conductor, and the soloists. So the conductor who tackles *Messiah* must be plucky, for the competition is fierce and the field overcrowded with excellent recordings, including several that utilize Mozart’s orchestration for Vienna performances in 1789.

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John Rutter's name, when attached to any recording, is guaranteed sale, for there are very few choral singers who haven't performed his music, heard it in concert, or broadcast. Here the esteemed conductor expands his musical horizon in what may be the first in a series of recordings for Hendrickson Publications. Rutter's recording is a traditional approach to this iconic work; it includes no surprises. All of the arias are presented in their familiar versions and Rutter's soloists avail themselves of opportunities for appropriate ornamentation, but their choices are tasteful, and never extravagant.

The soloists will not be familiar to many, but they are clearly exceptional in their understanding and execution of the music, singing with enviable emotion, gravitas, and tenderness, making them far more than merely reliable participants. Rutter's Cambridge Singers are equally impressive in their poise, agility, verve, and beauty of tone. The musicians of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra are on their game as well, supporting the soloists and chorus with effective, stylish, and energetic playing throughout. The acoustics of All Hallows, Gospel Oak, provide the ideal sonic warmth and aural bloom without obfuscating Handel's textures. This release effectively combines tradition, scholarship, and common sense in a way that few have or can.

Rutter's excellent feel for this music, his intelligence, and his sturdy and steady hand, make this—in my opinion—the finest modern-instrument recording since the legendary Philips release by Colin Davis in the mid 1960s. If you cannot tear yourself away from period-instrument recordings, then you may want to investigate the releases by the Gabrieli Consort (Archiv 453 464) or the Taverner Consort (Virgin 61330). There is also an excellent release by Apollo's Fire, the Cleveland Baroque orchestra and chorus, available through their Web site, [www.apollofire.org](http://www.apollofire.org). ---FANFARE: Michael Carter, [arkivmusic.com](http://arkivmusic.com)

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