

Hallelujah Handel

Exploring Handel's Messiah

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Programme

1. Introduction + Part 1, scenes 1-3
2. Part 1 : scenes 4-5
- 3. Part 2: scenes 1-4**
4. Part 2: scenes 5-7
5. Part 3: scenes 1-2
6. Part 3: scenes 3-4

Messiah
an Oratorio

Layout of the whole Messiah

Part I

"The prophecy and realisation of God's plan to redeem mankind by the coming of the Messiah" (= **Advent and Christmas**, the life of Jesus)

Part II

"The accomplishment of redemption by the sacrifice of Christ, mankind's rejection of God's offer, and mankind's utter defeat when trying to oppose the power of the Almighty" (= **Lent, Easter, Ascension and Pentecost**)

Part III

"A Hymn of Thanksgiving for the final overthrow of Death" (= **the Church year**)

Part II

Part II

"The accomplishment of redemption by the sacrifice of Christ, mankind's rejection of God's offer, and mankind's utter defeat when trying to oppose the power of the Almighty"

Scene 1: "The redemptive sacrifice, the scourging and the agony on the cross" (movements 22–30)

Scene 2: "His sacrificial death, His passage through Hell and Resurrection" (movements 31–32)

Scene 3: "His ascension" (movement 33)

Scene 4: "God discloses his identity in Heaven" (movements 34–35)

Scene 5: "Whitsun, the gift of tongues, the beginning of evangelism" (movements 36–39)

Scene 6: "The world and its rulers reject the Gospel" (movements 40–41)

Scene 7: "God's triumph" (movements 42–44)

Part II

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Scene 1				
22 / 19	<i>Behold the Lamb of God</i>	Chorus	John 1:29	Testimony of John the Baptist
23 / 20	<i>He was despised</i> He gave his back to his smiters	Air A	Isaiah 53:3 Isaiah 50:6	Songs of the suffering servant 4, 3
24 / 21	<i>Surely, He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows</i>	Chorus	Isaiah 53:4–5	Man of Sorrows, 4 continued
25 / 22	<i>And with His stripes we are healed</i>	Chorus	Isaiah 53:5	
26 / 23	<i>All we like sheep, have gone astray</i>	Chorus	Isaiah 53:6	
27 / 24	<i>All they that see Him, laugh Him to scorn</i>	Acc. T	Psalms 22:7	Psalm 22
28 / 25	<i>He trusted in God</i>	Chorus	Psalms 22:8	
29 / 26	<i>Thy rebuke hath broken His heart</i>	Acc. T	Psalms 69:20	Psalm 69
30 / 27	<i>Behold, and see if there be any sorrow</i>	Arioso T	Lamentations 1:12	Book of Lamentations
Scene 2				
31 / 28	<i>He was cut off out of the land of the living</i>	Acc. T	Isaiah 53:8	Man of Sorrows
32 / 29	<i>But Thou didst not leave his soul in hell</i>	Air T	Psalms 16:10	Psalm 16
Scene 3				
33 / 30	<i>Lift up your heads</i>	Chorus	Psalms 24:7–10	Psalm 24

II.1.22/19

Scene 1 is the longest sequence in The Messiah.

Chorus: Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world.

(John 1 : 29)

- The opening chorus "Behold the Lamb of God" begins like a French overture in G minor, a key of "tragic presentiment", according to Christopher Hogwood.
- Links with the overture, the prophecies of Isaiah and the words of Jesus.
- The continuo drops an octave, then the violins rise an octave, to express "Behold". After only three instrumental measures the voices proclaim the Testimony of John the Baptist, John 1:29, which recalls Isaiah 53.

II.1.22/19

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Chorus: Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world.

(John 1 : 29)

- The alto begins, followed after half a measure each by the soprano, the bass, and finally the tenor. After the initial rise, the melody falls in dotted rhythms, but rises on "that taketh away the sin of the world".
- The melody shows similarity to the beginning of "He shall feed his flock", but "sharpened" from major to minor, from triplets to dotted rhythm, and by the octave leap in the beginning.
- The second phrase is treated with ascending music in contrast to the descending setting of the first phrases.

II.1.23/20

Alto

He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

(Isaiah 53:3)

He gave His back to the smiters, and His cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: He hid not His face from shame and spitting.

(Isaiah 50:6)

- The dotted rhythm returns in instruments and voices in the chorus "Surely, He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows", the continuation of Isaiah's text, set in F minor.
- At about 10 minutes, this is the longest aria + chorus in the Messiah — underlining its central place. The form is ABA*.
- The music moved heavily with dissonance on "grief" and repeated emphasis on **despised** and **rejected**.
- It is followed by no fewer than *three* choruses, all taking up the verses of Isaiah 53.

II.1.24/21

Chorus

Surely He hath borne **our** griefs,
and carried **our** sorrows! He was
wounded for **our** transgressions,
He was bruised for **our** iniquities;
the chastisement of **our** peace was
upon Him.

(Isaiah 53:4-5)


- The chorus continues with the remainder of Isaiah 53:4-5 and ends on the words "the chastisement of our peace was upon him".
- The dotted rhythm of the scourging passage is echoed.
- The dotted rhythm is no longer from He was wounded etc.
- The orchestra joins the voices in a sustained passage filled with dissonance and a steady rhythm, emphasising "bruised" and "our iniquities."

II.1.25/22

Chorus

And with His stripes we are healed.

(Isaiah 53 : 5)



And with his stripes we are hea - led,

The first line of musical notation is in common time (C). It begins with a whole rest, followed by a half note G4, a quarter note F4, a quarter note E4, a quarter note D4, a quarter note C4, and a half note B3.



and with his stripes we are hea -

The second line of musical notation continues the melody. It starts with a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, a quarter note C5, a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note G4, a quarter note F4, a quarter note E4, and a half note D4.

- In the same key the chorus continues with a fugue "And with His stripes we are healed".
- Style: *stile antico* and a very strict fugue.
- NB the leap from the highest note (on "His") the lowest note ("stripes").
- The characteristic ascending fourth opens the countersubject. The word "healed" is later stressed by both long melismas and long notes.

II.1.26/23

Chorus

All we, like sheep, have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

(Isaiah 53:6)

- Unexpectedly “cheerful”, given the text, perhaps to capture the silliness of going astray.
- A fast chorus in F-major on a walking bass with irregular patterns and leaps. The voices utter twice together "All we like sheep", then two voice parts move simultaneously in different directions on "have gone astray", with the last syllable extended to eleven notes.
- The next bit of the text "we have turned" is illustrated by fast coloraturas, lacking direction.
- In a dramatic sudden adagio, full of chromatic tension, the movement ends on "and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all".
- F-minor returns, with great depth and drama. Finally the whole last sentence is given with maximum intensity and power.

II.1.26/23

Chorus

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(Isaiah 53:6)

- Myers comments about the chorus, which seems out of place at first sight: "In Handel's famous chorus sin glories in its shame with almost alcoholic exhilaration. His lost sheep meander hopelessly through a wealth of intricate semi quavers, stumbling over decorous roulades and falling into mazes of counterpoint that prove inextricable. A less dramatic composer than Handel would scarcely have rendered his solemn English text with such defiance, for the discrepancy between the self-accusing words and his vivacious music is patent to any listener emancipated from the lethargy of custom."

II.1.27/24

Accompagnato (Tenor or Soprano)

All they that see Him laugh Him to scorn; they shoot out their lips, and shake their heads, saying:

(Psalms 22:7)

- The thought "All they that see Him, laugh Him to scorn" is taken from Psalm 22 (Psalms 22:7), the psalm from which Jesus quoted on the cross, according to Mark and Matthew.
- The text is set as a short tenor *accompagnato*, again based on a pattern of dotted notes in the instruments. The strings through in violent figures after "laugh Him to scorn" and "shoot out their lips", similar to an outburst of laughter.
- The key of B-flat minor is termed "remote and barbarous" by Hogwood.

II.1.28/25

Chorus

He trusted in God that He would deliver Him; let Him deliver Him, if He delight in Him.

(Psalms 22 : 8)

- What they say is given to the chorus as a strict fugue in C minor: "He trusted in God, that He would deliver Him, if He delight in Him."
- Handel depicts the mocking, menacing crowd here, comparable to the *turbae* (the crowds) in Bach's Passions.

II.1.29/26

Accompagnato (Tenor or Soprano)

Thy rebuke hath broken His heart:
He is full of heaviness. He looked
for some to have pity on Him, but
there was no man, neither found
He any to comfort Him.

(Psalms 69:20)

- The tenor returns to sing a verse of the Psalm 69: "Thy rebuke hath broken His heart" (Psalms 69:20).
- Aching chromatic chords picture the broken heart.
- The accompagnato begins in A-flat major, shifts without stability and ends in B major.
- The tenor voice, going to report death and resurrection in scene 2, is comparable to the Evangelist in the Passions of Bach.

II.1.30/27

Arioso (Tenor or Soprano)

Behold, and see if there be any
sorrow like unto His sorrow.

(Lamentations 1 : 12)

- The tenor arioso "Behold, and see if there be any sorrow" (Lamentations 1:12) is based on text from the Book of Lamentations which is frequently associated with Good Friday, both Jesus and his mother Mary, although it originally lamented the destruction of Jerusalem.
- In the short movement in E minor, the accompaniment pauses rather regularly on the first and third beat of a measure.

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Part II

Part II

"The accomplishment of redemption by the sacrifice of Christ, mankind's rejection of God's offer, and mankind's utter defeat when trying to oppose the power of the Almighty"

Scene 1: "The redemptive sacrifice, the scourging and the agony on the cross" (movements 22–30)

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II.2.31/28

Accompagnato (Tenor or Soprano)

He was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgressions of Thy people was He stricken.

(Isaiah 53 : 8)

- In a restrained way, the death of the Messiah is told in another tenor accompagnato, as foretold by Isaiah, "He was cut off out of the land of the living" (Isaiah 53:8).
- Long chords begin in B minor and end in E major.
- Surprisingly brief, given the centrality of the death of Jesus...and yet appropriate.

II.2.32/29

Air (Tenor or Soprano)

But Thou didst not leave His soul in hell; nor didst Thou suffer Thy Holy One to see corruption.

(Psalms 16:10)

- His resurrection is again told by the tenor in an Air according to Psalm 16, "But Thou didst not leave his soul in hell" (Psalms 16:10).
- Psalm 16 is cited in the New Testament three times:
 - 16:5s : Luke 10:42
 - 8-11 : Act 2:25
 - 10 : Act 13:35
- The aria is in C-major, a ray of sunlight after the previous darkness.

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II.3.33/30

Chorus

Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in. Who is this King of Glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; **and the King of Glory shall come in.** Who is this King of Glory? The Lord of Hosts, He is the King of Glory.

(Psalms 24:7-10)

- Since the text has questions ("Who is the King of Glory?") and answers ("He is the King of Glory"), Handel divides the choir in the first section to a high, announcing group (sopranos I and II, alto) and a low, questioning group (alto, tenor, bass).
- This celebratory chorus is written for SSATB; it is written antiphonally for SSA and ATB, thus articulating the structure of the text.
- A dotted rhythm = the arrival of a king.
- **Bold:** an echo of the earlier "And the glory of the Lord."