

Messiah

Program Notes

About the Music
by Beth Buelow

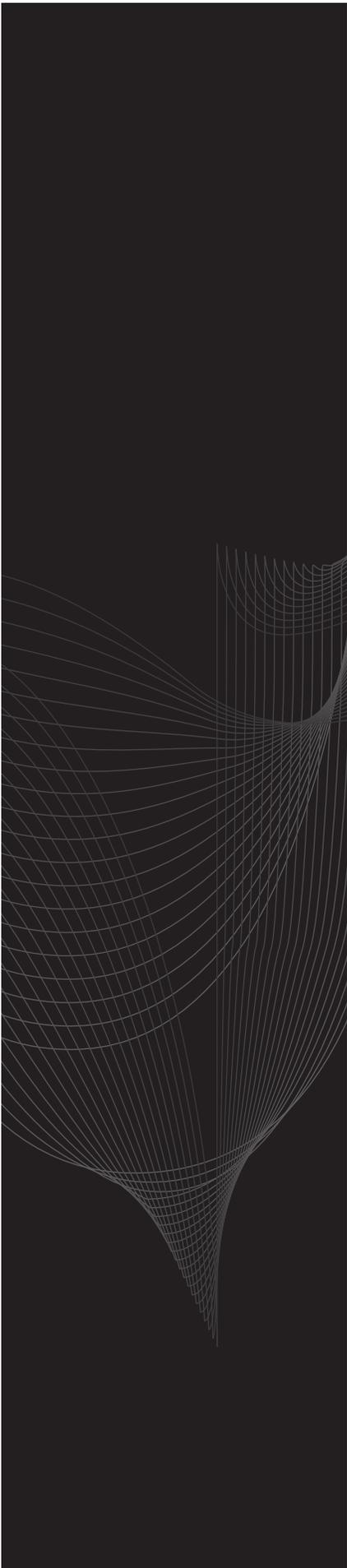
George Frederick Handel (1685-1759)
Messiah (1741)

The composer of the most famous oratorio ever composed almost missed his date with destiny. Handel was born in Halle, Germany, but settled in England in 1711. He became a naturalized British subject in 1726. In 1741, Charles Jennens, a great admirer and sometimes collaborator of Handel, presented him with a libretto based Old and New Testament passages from the King James version of the Bible. The libretto inspired Handel, and from August 22 to September 14, 1741, he composed what would become his most beloved and inspired work.

An oratorio means "oratory by music." While sharing the drama and story-telling nature of an opera, oratorios were performed without sets or costumes. During Handel's time, Bibles were too expensive for most people to own one; illiteracy also was a barrier. The oratorio genre originated as an accessible way to educate people in significant portions of the Bible.

It is thought that of all of the Messiah performances Handel led (and he did so on some three dozen occasions, always at Easter time), he gave the earned money to charity.

Messiah is divided into three sections. Part I recounts the foretelling of the Messiah by the prophets, and his eventual Nativity. Part II deals with Christ's suffering and death. The concluding section offers an affirmation of Christian faith and glimpses of Revelation. The famous "Hallelujah" chorus brings Part II to a close with triumphant joy. The tradition of the audience standing for the latter back to 1743 when King George II stood to express his admiration for the work, prompting the audience to follow his lead. Part III excerpts texts from the Pauline and Johannine letters of the New Testament, which formed the basis of the church's earliest Christology.



PART ONE

1. Overture (Sinfonia)

2. Recitative

Tenor

Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.

Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned.

The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness; prepare ye the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

(Isaiah 40: 1-3)

3. Air

Tenor

Ev'ry valley shall be exalted, and ev'ry moutain and hill made low; the crooked straight and the rough places plain.

(Isaiah 40: 4)

4. Chorus

And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

(Isaiah 40: 5)

5. Recitative

Bass

Thus saith the Lord, the Lord of hosts: Yet once a little while and I will shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land.

And I will shake all nations; and the desire of all nations shall come.

(Haggai 2: 6-7)

The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple, even the messenger of the Covenant, whom you delight in; behold, He shall come, saith the Lord of hosts.

(Malachi 3: 1)

6. Air

Bass

But who may abide the day of His coming, and who shall stand when He appeareth? For He is like a refiner's fire.

(Malachi 3: 2)

7. Chorus

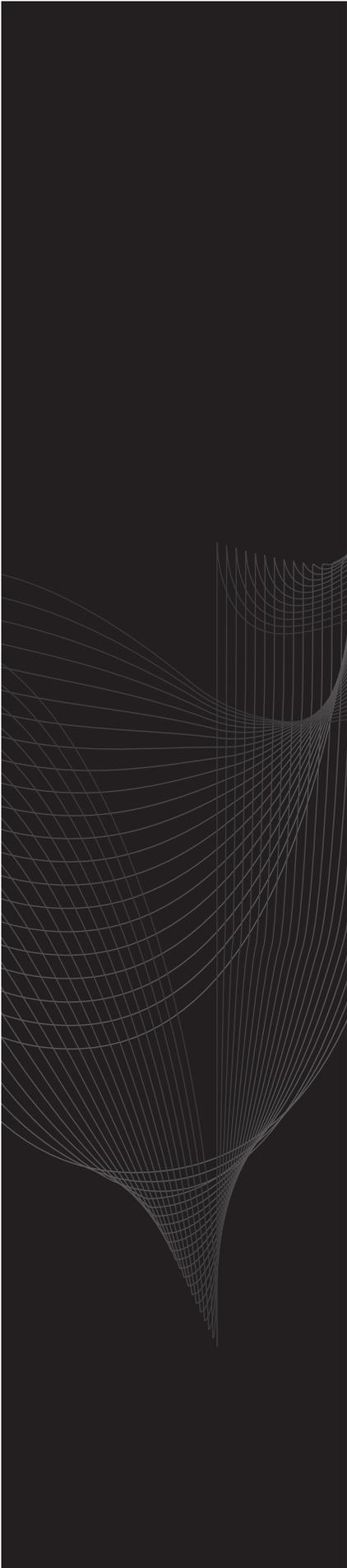
And He shall purify the sons of Levi, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.

(Malachi 3: 3)

8. Recitative

Alto

Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name Emmanuel, God with us.



(Isaiah 7: 14; Matthew 1: 23)

9. Air

Alto

O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion, get thee up into the high mountain. O thou that tellest good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, behold your God!

(Isaiah 40: 9)

Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.

(Isaiah 60: 1)

Chorus

O thou that tellest ...

10. Recitative

Bass

For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people; but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee.

And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.

(Isaiah 60: 2-3)

11. Air

Bass

The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; and they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.

(Isaiah 9: 2)

12. Chorus

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon His shoulder; and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.

(Isaiah 9: 6)

13. Pastoral Symphony

14a. Recitative

Soprano

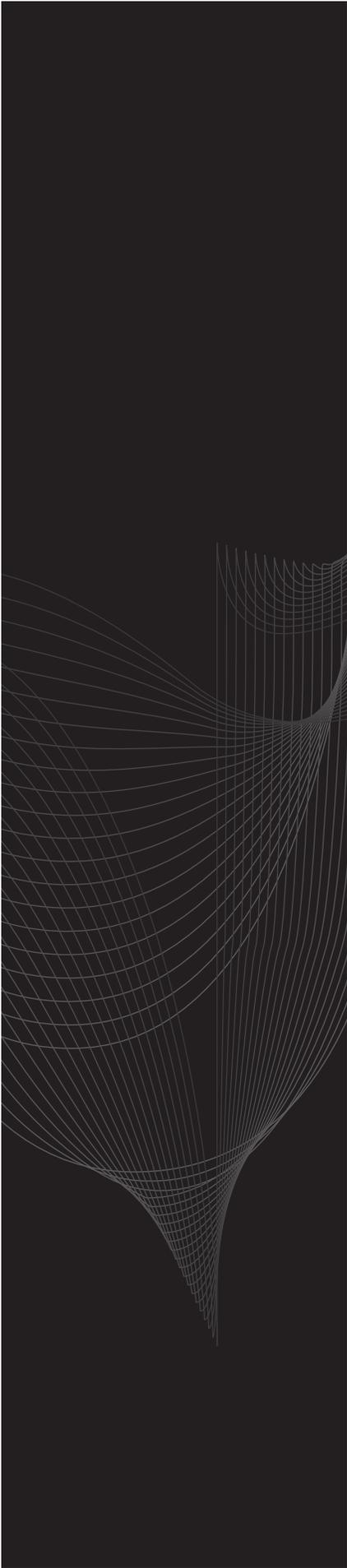
There were shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night.

(Luke 2: 8)

14b. Recitative

Soprano

And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were sore afraid.



(Luke 2: 9)

15. Recitative

Soprano

And the angel said unto them: "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."

(Luke 2: 10-11)

16. Recitative

Soprano

And suddenly there was with the angel, a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying:

(Luke 2: 13)

17. Chorus

"Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth, good will towards men."

(Luke 2: 14)

18. Air

Soprano

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem!

Behold, thy King cometh unto thee; He is the righteous Saviour, and He shall speak peace unto the heathen.

Rejoice greatly. . . da capo

(Zechariah 9: 9-10)

19. Chorus

His yoke is easy, and His burden is light.

(Matthew 11: 30)

PART TWO

20. Air

Alto

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

(Isaiah 53: 3)

21. Chorus

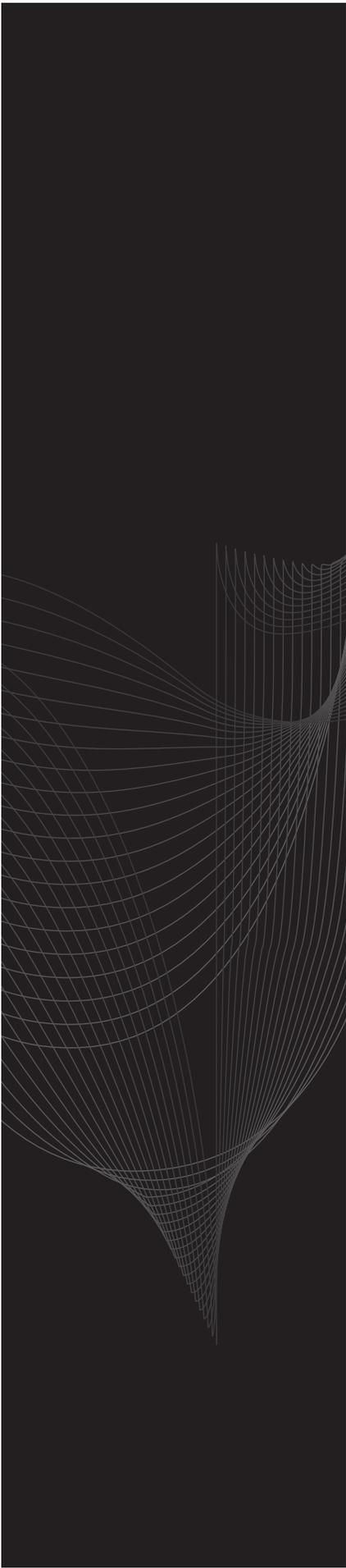
Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows!

He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him.

(Isaiah 53: 4-5)

22. 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)

23. Recitative

Tenor

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

(Psalm 22: 7)

24. Chorus

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

(Psalm 22: 8)

25. Recitative

Tenor

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.

(Psalm 69: 20)

26. Air

Tenor

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

(Lamentations 1: 12)

27. Chorus

Let All the Angels of God Worship Him. (Chorus)

(Hebrews 1: 6)

28. Air

Bass

Why do the nations so furiously rage together, and why do the
people imagine a vain thing?

The kings of the earth rise up, and the rulers take counsel together
against the Lord, and against His anointed.

(Psalm 2: 1-2)

29. Chorus

Let us break their bonds asunder, and cast away their yokes from
us.

(Psalm 2: 3)

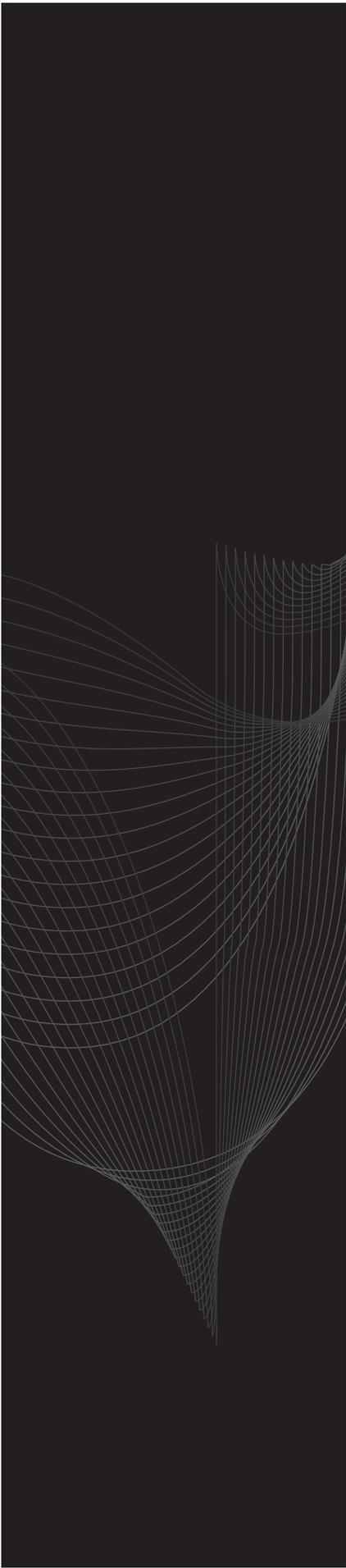
30. Recitative

Tenor

He that dwelleth in Heav'n shall laugh them to scorn;
The Lord shall have them in derision.

(Psalm 2: 4)

31. Air



Tenor

Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.

(Psalm 2: 9)

32. Chorus

Hallelujah: for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth.

(Revelation 19: 6)

The kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever.

(Revelation 11: 15)

King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.

(Revelation 19: 16)

Hallelujah!

PART THREE

33. Air

Soprano

I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth.

And though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.

(Job 19: 25-26)

For now is Christ risen from the dead, the first fruits of them that sleep.

(I Corinthians 15: 20)

34. Chorus

Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

(I Corinthians 15: 21-22)

35. Recitative

Bass

Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.

(I Corinthians 15: 51-52)

36. Air

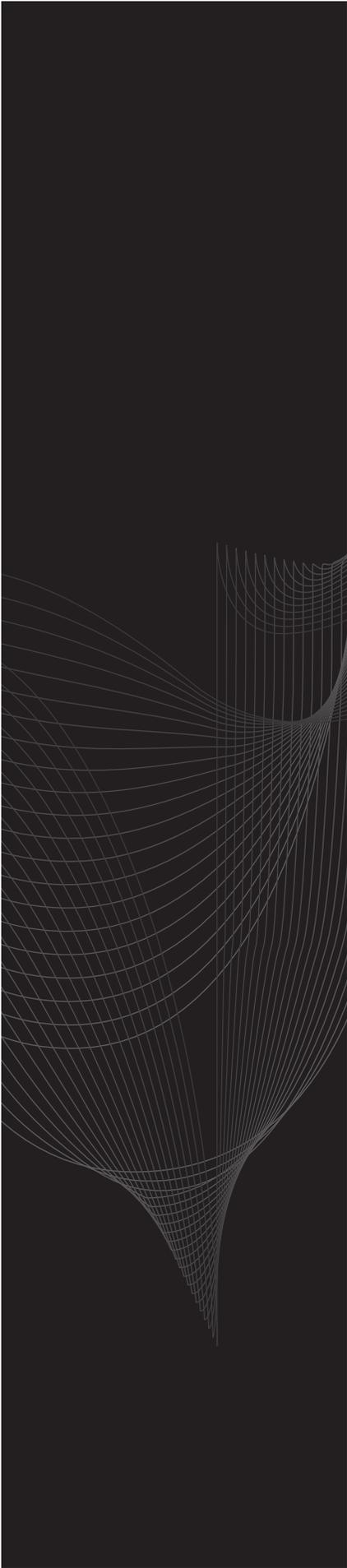
Bass

The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

For this corruptible must put on incorruption and this mortal must put on immortality.

The trumpet. . . da capo

(I Corinthians 15: 52-53)



37. Chorus

Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, and hath redeemed us to God by His blood, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.

Blessing and honour, glory and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever.

Amen.

(Revelation 5: 12-14)