

ALEXANDER'S FEAST

SUNDAY, APRIL 11, 2010 – 3:00 PM
FIRST FREE METHODIST CHURCH

Catherine Haight, soprano
Melissa Plagemann, mezzo-soprano
Stephen Wall, tenor
Charles Robert Stephens, baritone

ORCHESTRA SEATTLE -- SEATTLE CHAMBER SINGERS

George Shangrow, conductor

PROGRAM

GEORG FRIEDRICH HÄNDEL (1685-1759)

ALEXANDER'S FEAST

OR THE
POWER OF MUSICK.
An ODE
Wrote in Honour of St. CECILIA
By Mr. DRYDEN.
Set to Musick by
Mr. Handel.

First Part

– Intermission –

Second Part

Please disconnect signal watches, pagers and cellular telephones. Thank you.
Use of cameras and recording equipment is not permitted in the concert hall.

OUR SOLOISTS

Soprano **Catherine Haight** is a favorite of Seattle audiences, having performed with a variety of Northwest musical groups over the past sixteen years. In June of 2003 she was privileged to appear as a soloist along with Jane Eaglen and Vinson Cole as a part of the gala program that officially opened McCaw Hall, Seattle's new opera house. Ms. Haight has been a featured soloist with Pacific Northwest Ballet in their productions of Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana* for over ten years; these performances have taken her to the Kennedy Center and Melbourne, Australia, where she received glowing reviews. Ms. Haight is especially familiar with the Baroque repertoire, having performed most of the major works of Bach and Handel, but she is equally at home with the composers of the Classical and Romantic eras. She has been a frequent performer with OSSCS, and has made three recordings, including *Messiah*, with OSSCS and conductor George Shangrow. Ms. Haight is a member of the voice faculty at Seattle Pacific University.

Melissa Plagemann has been praised by audiences and the press for her "clear, burnished voice" (Tacoma News Tribune) and "attractively expressive mezzo" (Crosscut Seattle). She performs frequently with the finest musical organizations throughout the Pacific Northwest, and is rapidly becoming known for the passion and musical intelligence she brings to performances on opera and concert stages alike. Recent performances include Handel's *Messiah* with the Tacoma and Auburn Symphonies, Saint-Saëns' *Christmas Oratorio* with Orchestra Seattle, The Nutcracker and West Side Story Suite with Pacific Northwest Ballet, Rosina with the newly formed Vashon Opera, and performances with the Second City Chamber Series, the Affinity Chamber Players, and at the American Harp Association national conference. She is on the faculty at Pacific Lutheran University.

Tenor **Stephen Wall** has appeared frequently with Orchestra Seattle and the Seattle Chamber Singers. He has been featured in leading and supporting roles with Seattle Opera for the past 25 years. He also has appeared with the Portland Opera, Utah Festival Opera, and Tacoma Opera. He has soloed with the symphonies of Seattle, Vancouver, Spokane, Everett, Bellevue, Yakima, Pendleton, Great Falls and Sapporo (Japan). Mr. Wall appears on the OSSCS recording of Handel's *Messiah*. In addition to his solo appearances Mr. Wall has served as the music director for many music theater productions in Western Washington. He maintains an active voice studio in Seattle.

Charles Robert Stephens' career spans a wide variety of roles and styles in opera and concert. His performances show "a committed characterization and a voice of considerable beauty." (Opera News) With the New York City Opera, he recently sang the New York premiere of Adamo's *Little Women*, and was hailed by The New York Times as a "baritone of smooth distinction." Since his 1995 debut in *La Bohème* with the NYCO, he has also sung leading roles in *Die Tote Stadt*, *Madama Butterfly*, and *La Traviata*. Mr. Stephens has sung on numerous occasions as guest soloist at Carnegie Hall with the Oratorio Society of New York, the Masterworks Chorus, Musica Sacra and with Opera Orchestra of New York. Since moving to the Pacific Northwest in 2004, Mr. Stephens has performed with most of the orchestras and opera companies in the Pacific Northwest including those of Spokane, Tacoma, Portland and Seattle. Mr. Stephens teaches voice at Pacific Lutheran University and the University of Puget Sound.

ORCHESTRA SEATTLE

Violin	Viola	Bass	Bassoon	Harpsichord
Susan Carpenter	Beatrice Dolf	Jo Hansen*	Jeff Eldridge*	Lisa Lewis
Stephen Hegg	Katherine McWilliams	Ericka Kendall	Michel Jolivet	
Jason Hershey	Sam Williams*		Judy Lawrence	
Manchung Ho				
Fritz Klein**				
Pam Kummert	Priscilla Jones	Flute	Horn	Organ
Stephen Provine*	Katie Sauter Messick	Jenna Calixto*	Don Crevie	Robert Kechley
Theo Schaad	Daisy Shangrow	Melissa Underhill	Jim Hendrickson	
Janet Showalter	Matthew Wyant*	Oboe		Timpani
Kenna Smith-		David Barnes*		Dan Oie
Shangrow		Beth Wren	Trumpet	
			Janet Young	
				** concertmaster
				* principal

SEATTLE CHAMBER SINGERS

Soprano	Alto	Tenor	Bass
Hilary Anderson	Melissa Thirloway	Laurie Medill	Andrew Danilchik
Crissa Cugini	Liesel van Cleff	Paula Rimmer	Doug Durasoff
Kyla DeRemer	Pat Vetterlein	Annie Thompson	Stephen Keeler
Dana Durasoff			Dennis Moore
Cinda Freece			Jeff Thirloway
Anne Grosse-Wilde	Julia Akoury Thiel		Skip Viau
Jill Kraakmo	Carolyn Avery		Richard Wyckoff
Peggy Kurtz	Jane Blackwell		
Lila Woodruff May	Deanna Fryhle		
Nancy Shasteen	Pamela Ivezic		
	Lorelette Knowles		

PART ONE

1. Overture

2. Recitative

Tenor

'Twas at the royal feast, for Persia won
By Philip's warlike son:
Aloft in awful state
The god-like hero sate
On his imperial throne:
His valiant peers were plac'd around;
Their brows with roses and with myrtles bound.
So should desert in arms be crown'd.
The lovely Thaïs by his side
Sate like a blooming Eastern bride,
In flow'r of youth, and beauty's pride.

3. Air (tenor) and Chorus

Happy, happy, happy pair!
None but the brave,
None but the brave,
None but the brave deserves the fair.

4. Recitative

Tenor

Timotheus plac'd on high,
Amid the tuneful quire,
With flying fingers touch'd the lyre.
The trembling notes ascend the sky,
And heav'nly joys inspire.

5. Accompagnato

Soprano

The song began from Jove,
Who left his blissful seats above;
(Such is the pow'r of mighty love)
A dragon's fiery form bely'd the God;
Sublime, on radiant spires he rode,
When he to fair Olympia press'd,
And while he sought her snowy breast:
Then, round her slender waist he curl'd,
And stamp'd an image of himself, a sov'reign of the world.

6. Chorus

The list'ning crowd admire the lofty sound,
"A present deity!" they shout around;
"A present deity!" the vaulted roofs rebound.

7. Air

Soprano

With ravish'd ears
The monarch hears,
Assumes the God,
Affects to nod,
And seems to shake the spheres.

8. Recitative

Tenor

The praise of Bacchus, then, the sweet musician sung;
Of Bacchus, ever fair, and ever young:
The jolly God in triumph comes;
Sound the trumpets, beat the drums:
Flush'd with a purple grace,
He shows his honest face;
Now give the hautboys breath; he comes, he comes!

9. Air and Chorus

Bass

Bacchus, ever fair and young,
Drinking joys did first ordain;
Bacchus' blessings are a treasure,
Drinking is the soldier's pleasure:
Rich the treasure,
Sweet the pleasure,
Sweet is pleasure after pain.

Chorus

Bacchus' blessings are a treasure,
Drinking is the soldier's pleasure:
Rich the treasure,
Sweet the pleasure,
Sweet is pleasure after pain.

10. Recitative

Tenor

Sooth'd with the sound, the king grew vain;
Fought all his battles o'er again;
And thrice he routed all his foes, and thrice he slew the slain!
The master saw the madness rise,
His glowing cheeks, his ardent eyes;
And while he Heav'n and earth defy'd,
Chang'd his hand, and check'd his pride.

11. Accompagnato

Soprano

He chose a mournful muse,
Soft pity to infuse.

12. Air

Soprano

He sung Darius great and good,
By too severe a fate,
Fall'n from his high estate,
And welt'ring in his blood:
Deserted at his utmost need,
By those his former bounty fed,
On the bare earth expos'd he lies,
Without a friend to close his eyes.

13. Accompagnato

Soprano

With downcast looks the joyless victor sate,
Revolving in his alter'd soul,
The various turns of chance below,
And, now and then, a sigh he stole,
And tears began to flow.

14. Chorus

Behold Darius, great and good,
Fall'n, fall'n, fall'n, fall'n, welt'ring in his blood;
On the bare earth expos'd he lies,
Without a friend to close his eyes.

15. Recitative

Tenor
The mighty master smil'd to see
That love was in the next degree;
'Twas but a kindred sound to move,
For pity melts the mind to love:

16. Arioso

Soprano
Softly sweet, in Lydian measures,
Soon he sooth'd his soul to pleasures.

17. Air

Tenor
War, he sung, is toil and trouble,
Honour but an empty bubble,
Never ending, still beginning,
Fighting still, and still destroying;
If the world be worth thy winning,
Think, oh think it worth enjoying,
Lovely Thais sits beside thee,
Take the good the Gods provide thee.
War he sung . . . *da capo*

18a. Chorus

The many rend the skies, with loud applause;
So love was crown'd, but music won the cause.

19. Air

Soprano
The Prince, unable to conceal his pain,
Gaz'd on the fair,
Who caus'd his care;
And sigh'd and look'd, sigh'd and look'd,
Sigh'd and look'd, and sigh'd again:
At length with love and wine at once oppress'd,
The vanquish'd victor sunk upon her breast.
The Prince . . . *da capo*

18b. Chorus

The many rend the skies, with loud applause;
So love was crown'd, but music won the cause.

PART TWO

20. Accompagnato and Chorus

Tenor
Now strike the golden lyre again,
A louder yet — and yet a louder strain!
Break his bands of sleep asunder,
And rouse him, like a rattling peal of thunder.
Hark, hark! — the horrid sound
Has rais'd up his head,
As awak'd from the dead,
And amaz'd, he stares around.

Chorus

Break his bands of sleep asunder,
And rouse him, like a rattling peal of thunder.

21. Air

Bass
Revenge, revenge, Timotheus cries,
See the furies arise,
See the snakes that they rear,
How they hiss in their hair,
And the sparkles that flash from their eyes!
Behold a ghastly band,
Each a torch in his hand!
Those are Grecian ghosts, that in battle were slain,
And unbury'd, remain
Inglorious on the plain.
Revenge. . . *da capo*

22. Accompagnato

Tenor
Give the vengeance due
To the valiant crew:
Behold how they toss their torches on high,
How they point to the Persian abodes,
And glitt'ring temples of their hostile gods!

23. Air

Tenor
The princes applaud with a furious joy;
And the king seiz'd a flambeau, with zeal to destroy.

24. Air and Chorus

Soprano
Thais led the way,
To light him to his prey;
And like another Helen, fir'd another Troy.
The princes applaud with a furious joy;
And the king seiz'd a flambeau, with zeal to destroy.

Chorus

The princes applaud with a furious joy;
And the king seiz'd a flambeau, with zeal to destroy.

25. Accompagnato and Chorus

Tenor

Thus long ago,
Ere heaving bellows learn'd to blow,
While organs yet were mute,
Timotheus to his breathing flute,
And sounding lyre,
Could swell the soul to rage, or kindle soft desire.

Chorus

At last divine Cecilia came,
Inventress of the vocal frame;
The sweet enthusiasts from her sacred store,
Enlarg'd the former narrow bounds,
And added length to solemn sounds,
With Nature's mother-wit, and arts unknown before.

26. Recitative

Alto

Your voices tune, and raise them high,
Till th'echo from the vaulted sky
The blest Cecilia's name;
Music to Heav'n and her we owe,
The greatest blessing that's below;
Sound loudly then her fame:

27. Duetto

Soprano and Alto

Let's imitate her notes above,
And may this evening ever prove,
Sacred to harmony and love.

28. Chorus

Your voices tune, and raise them high,
Till th'echo from the vaulted sky
The blest Cecilia's name;
Music to Heav'n and her we owe,
The greatest blessing that's below;
Sound loudly then her fame:
Let's imitate her notes above,
And may this evening ever prove,
Sacred to harmony and love.

29. Recitative

Tenor

Let old Timotheus yield the prize,
Bass

Or both divide the crown;
He rais'd a mortal to the skies,

Tenor

She drew an angel down.

30. Soli and Chorus

Let old Timotheus yield the prize,
Or both divide the crown;
He rais'd a mortal to the skies,
She drew an angel down.

Georg Friedrich Händel

(b. February 23, 1685, Halle, Germany; d. 1759, London, England)

Alexander's Feast, or, The Power of Musick:

An Ode in Honour of St. Cecilia

Hear how *Timotheus'* various lays surprise,
And bid alternate Passions fall and rise;
While, at each Change, the Son of *Libyan Jove*
Now burns with Glory, and then melts with Love;
Now his fierce Eyes with sparkling Fury glow,
Now Sighs steal out, and Tears begin to flow;
Persians and *Greeks* like turns of Nature found,
And the World's Victor stood subd'd by Sound.

— Alexander Pope (1688-1744): *Essay on Criticism* (1711)

These lines by the famous English poet and critic were printed on the title page of the word-book for the first performance of this work in 1736.

By the time of his death in London in 1759, George Frideric Handel, a German musician of the Baroque Era (ca. 1600-1750) who had been trained in Italy, had become England's "national composer." This remarkable man, one of the choral art's greatest geniuses who gained wide fame for his operas, oratorios, and concertos, had come to be both a musical master and a "personality" regarded with special awe and affection throughout the musical world, and so he remains to this day, although the list of works for which he is famous is very short. It includes one complete oratorio, *Messiah* (which is not at all typical of Handel's style); a "funeral march" from another oratorio, *Saul*; a chorus from a third oratorio, *Judas Maccabaeus* (which critics consider to be one of Handel's "lesser works"); an air from the opera, *Serse*; the *Water Music*, a set of three orchestral suites consisting of a total of 21-movements that was performed for King George I from a barge floating down the River Thames during the summer of 1717; and the *Music for the Royal Fireworks*, a six-movement suite for a large wind band with percussion commissioned by King George II to celebrate the conclusion of the War of the Austrian Succession and the signing of the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1748.

The composer Georg Friederich Händel, who later became known as George Frideric Handel, was born to a 63-year-old court barber-surgeon, and his 34-year-old second wife, Dorothea, the daughter of a Lutheran pastor, in Halle, Germany, in 1685, just one month before Bach was born in Eisenach, about 80 miles away (these two titans of their time never met). There seems to have been no musical talent evident in Handel's family, but, according to Handel's first biographer, John Mainwaring:

"From his very childhood HANDEL had discovered such a strong propensity to Music, that his father, who always intended him for the study of the Civil Law, had reason to be alarmed. Perceiving that this inclination still increased, he took every method to oppose it. He strictly forbade him to meddle with any musical instrument; nothing of that kind was suffered to remain in the house, nor was he ever permitted to go to any other, where such kind of furniture was in use. All this caution and art, instead of restraining, did but augment his passion. He had found means to get a little clavichord [a stringed keyboard instrument widely used for practice and for composition, since it was too soft to be used in performance] privately convey'd to a room at the top of the house. To this room he constantly stole when the family was asleep. He had made some progress before Music had been

prohibited, and by his assiduous practice at hours of rest, had made such farther advances, as, tho' not attended to at that time, were no slight prognostications of his future greatness."

When young Georg, aged about eight years, and his father traveled to Weissenfels to visit the future composer's half-brother who was a valet to Duke Johann Adolf I, the boy's keyboard playing so strongly impressed the Duke that he persuaded Handel's father to allow the young musician to study composition, harpsichord, organ, violin, and oboe with Halle's most prominent organist-composer, Friedrich Wilhelm Zachau, organist at the Lutheran Church of Our Lady. Law studies at the University of Halle followed in 1702, and the young man was soon appointed organist at a Calvinist cathedral, but in 1703 he moved to Hamburg, opera capital of Germany, to take a position as violinist and harpsichordist in the opera orchestra, and to explore the wider world of music. He became good friends with a fellow musician, Johann Mattheson, and that August, Handel and Mattheson visited the famous organist/composer Dietrich Buxtehude (1637-1707) to explore the possibilities of becoming his assistant and then successor as organist of the renowned Marienkirche in Lübeck. One of the position's requirements was the necessity of marrying Anna Margareta, the eldest of Buxtehude's seven daughters, and neither of the young men felt inclined to do so (the 20-year-old J.S. Bach walked 250 miles to visit the elderly Buxtehude two years later with similar musical interests and ambitions, and was reprimanded by his Arnstadt employer for staying in Lübeck for several months, but he also found marriage to the daughter, who was considerably older than he, an insurmountable obstacle; Buxtehude's post finally went to one Johann Schiefferdecker, who was evidently willing to acquire a wife along with the job!). Another of Handel's adventures while at the Hamburg opera concerned his involvement in a duel in December of 1704: Handel refused to relinquish the harpsichord to Mattheson during a performance of the latter's opera, *Cleopatra*. This led to the challenge of a sword duel between the two composers, during the course of which Handel was supposedly saved from death by a large button on his coat that deflected Mattheson's blade.

During 1705, Handel produced his first two operas, and his interest in this musical genre soon led him to highly-cosmopolitan Italy, opera's birthplace. Handel traveled through Italy from 1706 through 1710, studying Italian music and finding success as a composer of operas, oratorios, and some 100 short secular cantatas. In 1710, Handel was employed by Georg Ludwig, the Elector of Hanover, as Director of Music, but he immediately left for London and spent so much time enjoying his musical activities there that the Elector began to notice and to question his extended stays in England (as Bach's Arnstadt employer had objected to his organist's lengthy sojourn in Lübeck). Handel's employer, however, also happened to be the great-grandson of James I of England, and when Queen Anne died in 1714, the Elector of Hanover succeeded her as George I of England. Thus, Handel's German employer "joined" him in London, and the composer was able to avoid discipline for his truancy from the Hanoverian court! Handel then embarked upon a successful twenty-year career as an opera composer, producing some forty operas altogether, and became a naturalized British citizen in 1727 (in this year, he was commissioned to compose four anthems for the coronation ceremony of King George II, one of which, *Zadok the Priest*, has been part of every British coronation ceremony since). By about 1730, however, the English public was beginning to tire of Italian-style opera. Sensing that his career as an opera composer might be in jeopardy, the astute Handel soon began to produce another form of dramatic musical entertainment equally suited to his talents: the oratorio, an "unstaged opera" which Handel sometimes called "musical drama." In April 1737, however, the 52-year-old Handel suffered a stroke which paralyzed his right arm temporarily and left him unable to perform. This and other health problems,

including failing eyesight, seemed to point to the imminent end of his career, but Handel recovered surprisingly quickly and, beginning in about 1741, having lost great sums of money in operatic management, he embarked on a successful "second career" as a composer of oratorios, of which he produced about 30. Indeed, he is renowned today chiefly as the master of the English oratorio, his works in this form becoming the standard by which, for decades, all other choral and religious music was evaluated.

While returning to London from a trip to Germany in 1750 (the year of Bach's death), Handel was seriously hurt in a carriage accident in the Netherlands, and in 1751 the vision in one eye began to deteriorate (Handel lost his sight seven years later after unsuccessful treatment by the famous "eye surgeon," John Taylor, a quack who supposedly confessed to having blinded hundreds of patients, of which J. S. Bach was one). He died at the age of 74 in London in 1759, *Messiah* having been the last performance he attended, a week prior to his death. He was buried with full state honors in Westminster Abbey, with over 3,000 people attending his funeral. In contrast to Bach, who married twice, fathered 20 children, was not widely known outside Germany, and left a rather small estate at his death, Handel spent his life as a bachelor (almost nothing is known of his personal life), and was wealthy when he died, a musician highly esteemed in England and Germany as the greatest organist and composer of his day.

The *Harvard Dictionary of Music* defines "oratorio" as "a composition with a long libretto (text) of religious or contemplative character that is performed in a concert hall or church without scenery, costumes, or action, by solo voices, chorus, and orchestra." In the oratorio, as opposed to the secular opera, the libretto is less dramatic; greater emphasis is placed on the role of the chorus; there is little or none of the opera's quick dialogue; and a narrator often introduces the characters, connects their parts, and describes the action. Handel and his audiences found that this musical form had numerous advantages over Italian opera: it did not have expensive staging and overpaid, egotistical, quarreling Italian star sopranos. (According to Handel's first biographer, "Having one day some words with CUZZONI on her refusing to sing *Falsa imagine* in OTTONE; 'Oh! Madame (said he) je scais [sic] bien que Vous êtes une véritable Diablesse: mais je Vous ferai sçavoir, moi, que je suis Beelzebub le Chéf des Diables!' ("Madam, I know you are a veritable devil, but I would have you know that I am Beelzebub, chief of the Devils!"). "With this he took her up by the waist, and, if she made any more words, swore that he would fling her out of the window." The 1727 opera season closed early because, during a performance with the Princess of Wales in attendance, a fist-fight broke out on stage between the prima donnas Cuzzoni and Faustina, called by contemporaries "The Rival Queens," that caused musicologist Charles Burney to observe: "It seems impossible for two singers of equal merit to tread the same stage *a parte équale* as for two people to ride on the same horse, without one being behind." The oratorio did have well-known, clear and exciting plots, taken mostly from mythology and from the Old Testament of the English Bible; texts in English, the language of the London audience; and rousing, dramatic choruses.

Handel's composition of *Alexander's Feast, or The Power of Musick*, was conceived late in 1735 and completed on January 17, 1736 (a little over five years before *Messiah* was written), possibly so that it could be performed before the beginning of Lent, during which "penitential" liturgical season audiences were much less likely to seek such grand entertainments as Handel was accustomed to presenting. It is not generally considered a "true" oratorio because its text, a 1697 ode by poet, dramatist, and critic, John Dryden (1631-1700), in celebration of St. Cecilia, the patron saint of music, while being in English, is not a dramatic one, having minimal plot, and the subject matter is secular. Its performance requirements are those of oratorio, however, and Handel and his audiences seemed to have considered it

to be one because it was not staged. Handel revised the work many times over the course of twenty-five performances, and you will hear it in this performance scored for soloists SATB, four-part chorus, and an orchestra including oboes, bassoons, horns, flutes (originally recorders), trumpets, timpani, strings, and continuo (harpsichord and/or organ, cello, and double bass). The seven stanzas of the ode's text were rearranged into two parts by Newburgh Hamilton, gentleman home-steward to the Earl of Strafford, who was a faithful Handelian and the author of the librettos for *Samson* and *An Occasional Oratorio*. In addition to dividing Dryden's ode into arias, recitatives, and choruses, Hamilton added a nine-line concluding section, beginning "Your voices tune," which was designed to stress the celebration of St. Cecilia, to whom the original ode refers only briefly in its final lines. In his preface to Dryden's poem, Hamilton states:

"I confess my principal view was not to lose this favourable opportunity of its being set to musick by that great master, who has with pleasure undertaken the task, and who only is capable of doing it justice; whose compositions have long shown that they can conquer even the most obstinate partiality, and inspire life into the most senseless words. If this entertainment can, in the least degree, give satisfaction to the real judges of poetry or musick I shall think myself happy in having promoted it, being persuaded that it is next to an improbability to offer the world anything in those arts more perfect than the united labours and utmost efforts of a Dryden and a Handel."

Alexander's Feast was first heard on February 19, 1736, at Covent Garden Theatre, and on the following night, with members of the royal family attending, the *London Daily Post* stated that "never was upon the like Occasion so numerous and splendid an Audience at any Theatre in London, there being at least 1300 Persons present." It was Handel's habit to provide his audiences with a full evening of entertainment in three "acts," and *Alexander's Feast* is a work in only two parts. Handel therefore either extended the work with additional material (such as a brief third part consisting of his setting of the supplemental text by Hamilton mentioned above), or added a separate composition as a third part (for example, a new setting of Dryden's other St. Cecilia Ode, *From Harmony*, or Handel's oratorio, *The Choice of Hercules*). At the first performance of the oratorio, a concerto in three movements for "Harp, Lute, Lyrichord (a gut-strung harpsichord) and other Instruments" was played after the recitative "Timotheus, plac'd on high" in Part One to illustrate the lyre-playing of Timotheus; a four-movement concerto grosso for oboes, bassoon and strings, now known as the "Concerto in Alexander's Feast," and the Italian cantata, *Cecilia, volgi un sguardo*, were presented between Parts One and Two; and a concerto in four movements for chamber organ, oboes, bassoon and strings was inserted after the chorus, "Let old Timotheus yield the prize" in Part Two.

Part One of Alexander's Feast takes place at the celebration in the palace in Persepolis that followed Alexander the Great's conquest of Persia in 330 B.C.E. The feast's chief entertainment is provided by Timotheus (perhaps a reference to the Greek musician and poet, Timotheus of Miletus (c. 446-357 B.C.E.)), who, accompanying his songs on the lyre, begins by referring to Alexander's supposed descent from the god Jove (Zeus), who appeared to and coupled with his mother Olympias as a dragon, rather than from Philip of Macedon. Timotheus' music excites the banqueters and inflates the king's ego. The bard's next theme, appropriate for a banquet, is the exaltation, to the accompaniment of horns and oboes, of Bacchus, the god of wine and youth. When this threatens to incite the king and all the revelers to riot, Timotheus quiets the company and stirs their pity by reminding them of the tragic story of Alexander's enemy, Darius, the

Persian king assassinated by his own generals and abandoned on the battlefield. Timotheus' music at last "melts Alexander's mind to love" and its joys (in the person of the beautiful Athenian courtesan, Thais, seated beside him), declaring that Alexander, "the brave," deserves Thais, "the fair." When love and wine vanquish the king and he sinks upon the breast of Thais, the feast comes to an end.

In Part Two, Timotheus rouses Alexander with battle music "like a peal of thunder" and cries for the avenging of the deaths of the Greek soldiers killed in the Persian wars; the burning of the palace, encouraged by Thais and the courtiers, will be Alexander's revenge. The story proper ends with the palace's destruction, and the rest of Dryden's ode forms a commentary. The poet points out that Timotheus was able, in pagan times, to manipulate Alexander's emotions and actions through his music, but since the organ was invented and St. Cecilia sanctified the art of music, we enjoy musical powers today beyond those upon which Timotheus could call. Timotheus' raising of Alexander to god-like status through singing of his divine origins is compared to the greatness of St. Cecilia, who drew the "angel" of the divine art of music down to us.

Handel's unmatched dramatic imagination was fired by Dryden's wit, his vivid images, and his poem's clearly contrasting moods. The result is a brilliant work, as Handel's "English" style of composition began to flower, that is one of the finest examples of English Baroque musical art and the setting of a vernacular text. The work is filled with arresting instrumental colors and examples of "tone painting" as Handel uses music to illustrate words and emotional states (the grand chorus, "Let old Timotheus yield the prize," a quadruple fugue that is based on four distinct musical themes, is a good example). The choral writing is highly original, e.g., in the chorus' dramatic exclamations in the *passacaglia* (a form featuring a repeated bass pattern above which the music varies), "The many rend the skies;" in the heart-piercing lament for the murdered King Darius, with its melancholy accompaniment reminiscent of dripping rain; in the rich and stately "anthem" for six-part chorus, "The listening crowd admire the lofty sound;" and in "Break his bands of sleep asunder," in which the cries of the chorus explode above a repeated martial figure, emphasized by the use of trumpets and imitative of and combined with thundering timpani. The solos are sometimes graceful, sometimes animated, and sometimes contemplative, as Handel depicts the changing moods produced by the power of music. Several of the solos are coupled with choral interpretations of their material: "Bacchus ever fair and young," in which horn fanfares accompany a rollicking drinking song in 3/4-time for the lower choral voices, and the waltz-like "Thais led the way" (a dance to devastation?), with its slightly disturbing beauty. Some vocal solo numbers are decorated by prominent accompanying instrumental parts: for example, the solos, "War, he sung, is toil and trouble" and "The Prince, unable to conceal his pain," and the dramatic bass aria, "Revenge, Timotheus cries," one of Handel's most ambitious, in which the trumpet encourages the soloist in crying out for vengeance in the aria's frenzied, bellicose outer sections between which the bassoons (the torch-bearing ghosts of the slain Greek warriors) wander haltingly among haunted ruins.

A week after Handel's death, the *Universal Chronicle* called Handel "The most Excellent Musician Any Age ever produced: Whose Compositions were a Sentimental Language Rather than mere Sounds; And surpassed the Power of Words In expressing the various Passions Of the Human Heart." The theme of Handel's *Alexander's Feast, or The Power of Musick* is exactly this ability of music to stir and express the passions of the heart in ways that mere words cannot, and, on this evening "sacred to harmony, sacred to love," may "music win the cause" as we, "with ravish'd ears" like those of Handel's "listening crowds," "admire the lofty sounds," "rend the skies with loud applause," and enjoy to the full the powerful gift of music, "the greatest blessing that's below!"

— notes by Lorelette Knowles

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