

The Ottumwa Area Community Chorus presents  
selections from George Frideric Handel's

# MESSIAH

A Community Sing-Along

*Messiah  
an Oratorio*

*(Title page of Handel's autographed score)*

**Featuring Invited Participating Singers from:**

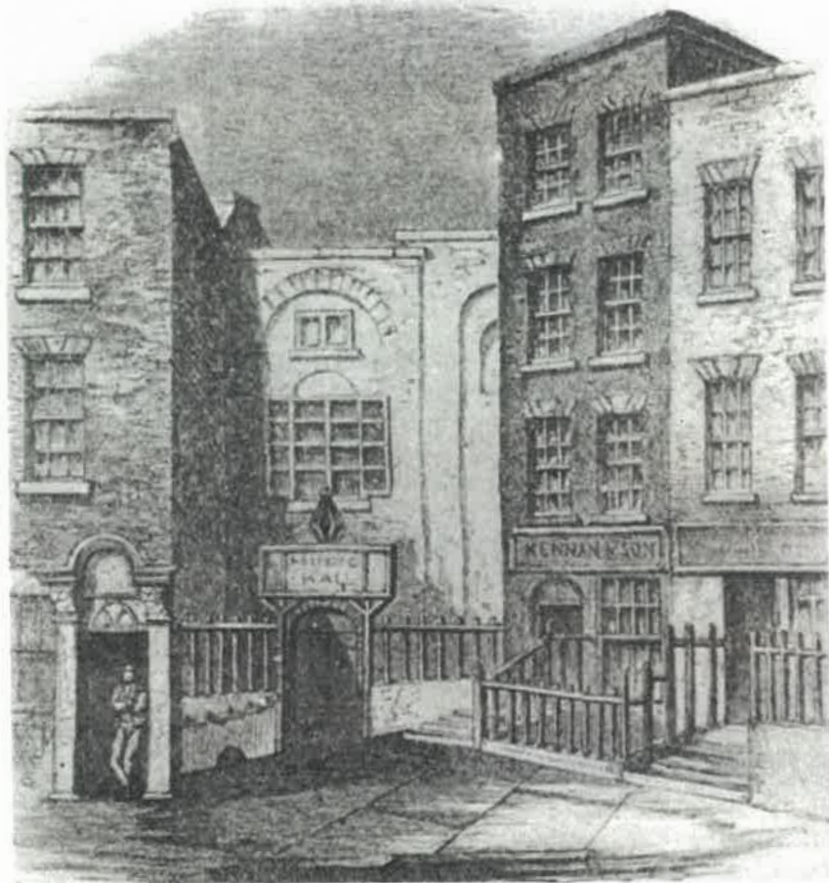
Ottumwa Area Community Chorus  
Indian Hills Community College Concert Choir  
Ottumwa High School Meistersingers  
The Iowa Wesleyan Choir  
Mt. Pleasant Chorale

December 12, 2021  
First Presbyterian Church  
Ottumwa, Iowa

## WELCOME!

*Why have we chosen to do a "Messiah sing along"?*

The sing-along performances of *Messiah* have been done, year after year, far and wide all around the world, and this ongoing tradition is a testament to the high caliber and timelessness of this most powerful musical masterpiece. By way of giving one notable example, each year the 100-voice Metropolitan Chorus performs a sing-along of Handel's *Messiah* at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. Thousands of amateur and professional singers from around the world attend each year to join the chorus in the performance of this timeless masterpiece.



*The Great Music Hall in Dublin, where Messiah was first performed*

## MESSIAH

**Information/Magnitude of the Impact of This Musical Masterpiece**

George Frideric Handel's *Messiah* is without a doubt an established favorite of the holiday season, and this Baroque-era oratorio still awes listeners 250 years after the composer's death. Handel composed *Messiah* in an astoundingly short amount of time, between three and four weeks in August and September 1741. "He would literally write from morning to night," says Sarah Bardwell of the Handel House Museum in London. The text was prepared in July by the prominent librettist, Charles Jennens, and was intended for an Easter performance the following year. "I hope [Handel] will lay out his whole Genius & Skill upon it, that the Composition may excel all his former Compositions, as the Subject excels every other Subject," Jennens wrote to a friend.

### **Creation and First Performance of *Messiah***

In 1741, swimming in debt and out of favor as a composer, Handel received a libretto from Charles Jennens, a poet with whom he had worked previously. Using scripture references, the libretto detailed the life of Jesus Christ from His birth and ministry to His crucifixion and resurrection. On August 22, 56-year-old Handel sequestered himself in his London home and began to compose music to the biblical texts heralding the life of Jesus Christ. In just 23 days he completed a 260-page oratorio. He titled the massive work *Messiah*.

*Messiah* was originally composed as an Easter offering, and it was first performed on the stage of Musick Hall in Dublin on April 13, 1742. The audience swelled to a record 700, as ladies had heeded pleas by management to wear dresses "without Hoops" in order to make "room for more company."

Handel told the sponsors of the premier performance of *Messiah* in Dublin, Ireland, on April 13, 1742, that the proceeds from the performance should be donated to prisoners, orphans and the sick. "I have myself been a very sick man, and am now cured," he said. "I was prisoner and have been set free."

The performance received rave reviews and exceeded expectations, raising 400 pounds and freeing 142 men from debtors' prison. The charity sponsors, hoping to squeeze in additional paying patrons, had asked the

ladies to refrain from wearing hoops under their skirts and encouraged men to leave their swords at home.

The men and women in attendance sat mesmerized from the moment the tenor followed the mournful string overture with his piercing opening line: "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God." Soloists alternated with wave upon wave of chorus, until, near the midway point, Cibber intoned: "He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." So moved was the Rev. Patrick Delany that he leapt to his feet and cried out: "Woman, for this be all thy sins forgiven thee!"

There were several reasons for the choice of Dublin for *Messiah's* debut. Handel had been downcast by the apathetic reception that London audiences had given his works the previous season. He did not want to risk another critical failure, especially with such an unorthodox piece. Other Handel oratorios had strong plots anchored by dramatic confrontations between leading characters. But *Messiah* offered the loosest of narratives: the first part prophesied the birth of Jesus Christ; the second exalted his sacrifice for humankind; and the final section heralded his Resurrection.

*Messiah's* success in Dublin was in fact quickly repeated in London. It took time for *Messiah* to find its niche as a Christmas favorite. "There is so much fine Easter music—Bach's St. Matthew Passion, most especially—and so little great sacral music written for Christmas," says Cummings. "But the whole first part of *Messiah* is about the birth of Christ." By the early 19th century, performances of *Messiah* had become an even stronger Yuletide tradition in the United States than in Britain.

### Growth in Number of Participants in *Messiah*

When Handel first composed the oratorio in 1741, he was heavily in debt, and he had no idea what singers or musicians would be available to him. For the Dublin premiere of *Messiah* in 1742, there were approximately 30 cathedral-trained singers and an orchestra of around the same size. For the Dublin premiere of *Messiah* in 1742, there were approximately 30 cathedral-trained singers and an orchestra of around the same size. With each performance that followed, Handel adapted the score to fit the available singers and musicians according to his budget. "Donald Burrows—the leading Handel scholar of our day—has proposed that *Messiah* was perhaps never performed the way Handel originally intended it, at least not during the composer's lifetime," said musicologist Luke Howard.

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While no one can be certain what Handel intended for the scope of *Messiah*, his orchestras grew in size throughout the years, and many choruses in *Messiah*, such as "Hallelujah," "Worthy Is the Lamb," "Glory to God," and others seem to beg for a large choir. Howard adds, "Perhaps the primary considerations that prevented Handel from planning *Messiah* for a massed chorus and orchestra were simply the cost, the difficulty of assembling such ensembles at the time, and the lack of an available hall big enough to accommodate them.

In the 19th century, larger halls were built and cathedral choral festivals were staged in England, which allowed for much larger audiences. In turn, new versions of *Messiah* were created to increase the amplitude for such audiences—most notably, Mozart's 1789 revision added classical woodwinds and brass and also changed some rhythms and notes to fit the modern audience.

In 1857, audiences of over 20,000 watched performances of *Messiah* at London's Crystal Palace, where a chorus of over 4,000 singers and an orchestra of over 500 were used.

Throughout the years, there have been many different styles of performances and recordings of *Messiah*, from small to large-scale, but one thing is certain—Handel's *Messiah* has stood the test of time. His masterpiece has lasted over 275 years and continues to be treated with respect throughout the world.

There is little doubt about Handel's own fondness for the work. His annual benefit concerts for his favorite charity—London's Foundling Hospital, a home for abandoned and orphaned children—always included *Messiah*. And, in 1759, when he was blind and in failing health, he insisted on attending an April 6 performance of *Messiah* at the Theatre Royal in Covent Garden. Eight days later, Handel died at home.

## **DR. CHRISTINE BERGAN**

Christine is a full lyric soprano who has been actively performing for over 30 years. She has been the director of the Ottumwa Area Community Chorus for the past 5 years, during which time she developed a children's chorus that performs independently as well as with the prior existing adult chorus. She has been a voice instructor for over 30 years and currently teaches voice lessons at IHCC. She is a full-time assistant professor in Speech-Language Pathology (voice specialist) at Western Illinois University in Macomb, IL. (her current and permanent residence is still in Ottumwa). She completed a master's degree in vocal performance from UNI, a master's degree in speech-language pathology from UIOWA, and a doctorate in voice science from UIOWA. She is an active member of NATS, ASHA, and the Voice Foundation, where she has been an invited presenter on several occasions.

## **KENT JAGER**

Kent Jager is the organist at St. Paul's United Church of Christ in Oskaloosa. Prior to St. Paul's he was Director of Music at Queen of Angels Roman Catholic Parish in Chicago's Lincoln Square where he was principal organist and oversaw a graded choir program. He completed his graduate studies in Church Music at Northwestern University, Evanston, IL where he studied with Grigg Fountain and has an undergraduate degree in organ from Central College in Pella where he was a student of Davis Folkerts.

## **DR. DENNIS WILLHOIT**

Dennis Willhoit is a lyric tenor having performed in opera and oratorio performances across the United States in his 30-year career. He resides in Ottumwa.

## **BLAIR BUFFINGTON**

Blair Buffington joined the faculty of Iowa Wesleyan University in the fall of 2016 as Director of Choral Activities. With an extensive background steeped in choral music, voice science, and music education, he is the conductor and artistic director of The IW Choir, Primae Voces, and the Mount Pleasant Chorale. At IW, Professor Buffington teaches courses in conducting, music education-teacher preparation, and studio voice. During his tenure, he has been a regular guest conductor with the Southeast Iowa Symphony Orchestra. He is a frequent soloist in the community and a choral-vocal clinician regionally and nationally. Professor

Buffington is distinguished as the artistic director and producer of Christmas with Iowa Wesleyan and the annual Iowa Wesleyan Variety Show.

## **DR. JANENE SHELDON**

Dr. Janene Sheldon: Dr. Sheldon is the Professor of Choral Music at Indian Hills Community College, where she directs Concert Choir and Chamber Choir, and teaches Applied Voice and Piano, and Aural Skills. A singer, pianist, conductor, and composer, Dr. Sheldon received her MM and DMA degrees in Voice Performance from the University of Nebraska Lincoln, where she also minored in music composition and studied Speech Language Pathology. Her BA is in Music Education with a dance minor, Summa cum laude from Kearney State College (now UNK). Dr. Sheldon has performed numerous opera and musical theatre roles and appeared as a soloist with many organizations in Nebraska, Iowa, and Missouri, and Michigan. Dr. Sheldon has served as adjudicator, clinician, and choreographer throughout Nebraska and Iowa, was a Board of Trustees Scholar, Regents Scholar, a recipient of the Ida M. Vreeland Award for Composition at UNL, and has presented for the NATS Vocal Pedagogy Workshop at the National Conference.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

**First Presbyterian Church;** for the most generous use of their church for rehearsals and this performance!

**Janene Sheldon, Director of Choral Activities at IHCC;** for her amazing support of this endeavor and assistance with rehearsals.

**Blair Buffington, Director of Choral Activities at IWU;** for his collaboration and support of this endeavor.

**Dennis Vasconez, Director of OHS Meistersingers;** for his support of this endeavor, sharing of singers, etc.

**Jennifer Boyenga, Program Director of Fine Arts Department, IHCC;** for her support and willingness to help publicize this event

**Isaac Campbell, Digital Media Specialist;** for his professional and creative work on the posters/flyers and printed program

# MEMBERS OF THE MESSIAH CHORUS

Directed by Dr. Christine Bergan

## Sopranos

Courtney Beal-1, 2  
Shari Bral-1, 6  
Carol Frevert-1  
Crystal James-1  
Clare Robledo-4  
Janene Sheldon-3 (IHCC Director)  
Emily Speer-1  
Katie Streeby-1  
Peyton Titus-1  
Lisa Van Donselaar-3  
Delaney Van Ness-4  
Rebecca Whaley-4

## Tenors

Zander Johnson-2  
Alex Renneberg-1, 3  
Kyle Roemerman-7  
Bob Swanson-6  
David Sywassink-4  
Dennis Willhoit-7

## Altos

Cathy Angle-1  
Kaya Baca-1, 2  
Dani Benjamin-4  
June Burger-1  
Elli Bishop-1, 2  
Cindy Hedge-1  
Karen Merchant-1  
Kendall Newland-2  
Amelia Rios-Van Saun-4  
Cait Saunders-4  
Jewel Schultz-5  
Sharon Shaw-1  
Liz Stufflebeem-1  
Diana Swanson-6  
Katelyn Valentine-2  
Julia Werner-7

## Basses

Brandon Bossler-1  
Blair Buffington-4 (IWU Director)  
Jeremiah Carter-4  
Clayton Henriksen-4  
Mitchel Melvin-1, 3  
Bill Merchant-1  
James Preus-7  
Roderick Rath-2  
David Werner-7

1. *Member of Ottumwa Area Community Chorus*
2. *Member of Ottumwa High School Meistersingers*
3. *Member of Indian Hills Community College Concert Choir*
4. *Member of Iowa Wesleyan Choir*
5. *Member of Mount Pleasant Chorale*
6. *Member First Presbyterian Choir*
7. *From the community (no affiliation)*

*Selections from George Frideric Handel's*

# MESSIAH

## Overture

### Tenor Solos; featuring Dennis Willhoit

1. Comfort Ye, My People
2. Ev'ry Valley

### Chorus [Sing Along]

3. And The Glory Of The Lord

### Bass Solos; featuring Blair Buffington

4. Thus, Saith The Lord/And I Will Shake
5. But Who May Abide The Day Of His Coming/For He Is Like A Refiner's Fire

### Alto Solo & Chorus [Sing Along]; featuring Janene Sheldon

6. Behold, A Virgin Shall Conceive
7. O Thou That Tellest

### Chorus [Sing Along]

8. For Unto Us a Child is Born

### Soprano Recitatives; featuring Christine Bergan

9. There were shepherds abiding in the field
10. And lo, the Angel of The Lord came upon them and the angel said unto them/
11. And suddenly, there was with the Angel

### Chorus [Sing Along]

12. Glory to God

### Alto Recitative & Solo; featuring Janene Sheldon

13. Then Shall the Eyes of the Blind be Opened
14. He Shall Feed His Flock

### Soprano Solo; featuring Christine Bergan

15. Come Unto Him

### Chorus [Sing Along]

16. Amen
17. Hallelujah Chorus

## GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL

George Frideric Handel was born on a cold February day in 1685, deep in the heart of Germany. His father was a prominent and successful surgeon for the local duke, and he had determined early on that young George would study civil law. However, George was drawn to things more artistic, especially more musical. He was intrigued by instruments, the sounds they could make, and the feelings they could evoke. His practical father intervened and forbade him from taking part in what he called "musical nonsense."

By some unknown means, George was able to get a small clavichord and smuggle it to a tiny room at the top of the house. Then, at night, while the rest of the family was asleep, George would silently creep up to the room and play music, ever so quietly, late into the night. It was there that Handel discovered the magic of music. It came as quite a surprise to family and friends when at church one day the eight-year-old climbed up on the organ bench and began to play the postlude. Everyone was shocked, especially his father, who had no idea his son was so gifted. Despite this early demonstration of unusual talent, his father sternly reminded son that his destiny was for something more practical than music.



Soon, an acquaintance, the Duke of Weissenfels, heard the prodigy, then barely 11, playing the organ. The nobleman's recognition of the boy's genius likely influenced the doctor's decision to allow his son to become a musician. By 18, Handel had composed his first opera, *Almira*, initially performed in Hamburg in 1705. During the next five years, he was employed as a musician, composer and conductor at courts and churches in Rome, Florence, Naples and Venice, as well as in Germany, where the Elector of Hanover, the future King George I of England, was briefly his patron.

- Such free-spirited musical entrepreneurship was most possible in London, to which Handel moved permanently in 1710. A commercial boom underpinned by overseas trade had created a thriving new merchant and professional class that broke the monopoly on cultural patronage by the nobility. Adding zest and intrigue to the London music scene were rivalries that split the audience into two broad musical camps. On one side were defenders of the more conventional Italian opera style, who idolized the composer Giovanni Bononcini (1670-1747) and brought him to London. Enthusiasts of Handel's new Italian operas cast their lot with the German-born composer.

In the 1730s, the emotional and financial toll of producing operas, as well as changing audience tastes, contributed to Handel's growing interest in sacred oratorios—which required neither elaborate scenery nor foreign stars—including, eventually, *Messiah*. "With oratorios, Handel could be more his own master," says Keates. Although Handel neither married nor was known to have had a long-lasting romantic relationship, Handel was pursued by various young women and a leading Italian soprano, Vittoria Tarquini, according to accounts by his contemporaries. He was intensely loyal to friends and colleagues, however, he was reportedly capable of appalling temper outbursts. Because of a dispute over seating in an orchestra pit, he fought a near-fatal duel with a fellow composer and musician, Johann Mattheson, whose sword thrust was blunted by a metal button on Handel's coat, yet the two remained close friends for years afterward.

Amassing a fortune through his music and shrewd investments in London's burgeoning stock market, Handel donated munificently to orphans, retired musicians and the ill. (He gave his portion of his *Messiah* debut proceeds to a debtors' prison and hospital in Dublin.) A sense of humanity and charity imbues his music as well—a point often made by conductors who compare Handel with Bach. But where Bach's oratorios exalted God, Handel was more concerned with the feelings of mortals. "Even when the subject of his work is religious, Handel is writing about the human response to the divine," (Bicket).

Nowhere is this more apparent than in *Messiah*. "The feelings of joy you get from the Hallelujah choruses are second to none. And how can anybody resist the Amen chorus at the end? It will always lift your spirits if you are feeling down." (Cummings). His final total estate was assessed at 20,000 pounds, which made him a millionaire by modern standards. He left the bulk of his fortune to charities and much of the remainder to friends, servants and his family in Germany.

## COMPOSITIONAL DETAILS:

*Messiah* (HWV 56)<sup>[1][n 1]</sup> is an English-language oratorio composed in 1741 by George Frideric Handel, with a scriptural text compiled by Charles Jennens from the King James Bible, and from the Coverdale Psalter, the version of the Psalms included with the Book of Common Prayer. It was first performed in Dublin on 13 April 1742 and received its London premiere nearly a year later. After an initially modest public reception, the oratorio gained in popularity, eventually becoming one of the best-known and most frequently performed choral works in Western music.

The text begins in Part I with prophecies by Isaiah and others, and moves to the annunciation to the shepherds, the only "scene" taken from the Gospels. In Part II, Handel concentrates on the Passion and ends with the "Hallelujah" chorus. In Part III he covers the resurrection of the dead and Christ's glorification in heaven. Handel wrote *Messiah* for modest vocal and instrumental forces, with optional settings for many of the individual numbers. In the years after his death, the work was adapted for performance on a much larger scale, with giant orchestras and choirs. In other efforts to update it, its orchestration was revised and amplified by, among others, Mozart (*Der Messias*).

In Christian theology, the Messiah is the savior of humankind. The Messiah (Māšīah) is an Old Testament Hebrew word meaning "the Anointed One", which in New Testament Greek is Christ, a title given to Jesus of Nazareth, known by his followers as "Jesus Christ". Handel's *Messiah* has been described by the early-music scholar Richard Lockett as "a commentary on [Jesus Christ's] Nativity, Passion, Resurrection and Ascension", beginning with God's promises as spoken by the prophets and ending with Christ's glorification in heaven.<sup>[14]</sup>

In contrast with most of Handel's oratorios, the singers in *Messiah* do not assume dramatic roles; there is no single, dominant narrative voice; and very little use is made of quoted speech. In his libretto, Jennens's intention was not to dramatize the life and teachings of Jesus, but to acclaim the "Mystery of Godliness",<sup>[15]</sup> using a compilation of extracts from the Authorized (King James) Version of the Bible, and from the Psalms included in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer.<sup>[16]</sup>

## TAKE HOME COLORING PAGE



*Handel Commemoration in Westminster Abbey, 1785*

The three-part structure of the work is similar in some ways to that of Handel's three-act operas, with the "parts" subdivided by Jennens into "scenes". Each scene is a collection of individual numbers or "movements" which take the form of recitatives, arias and choruses.<sup>[15]</sup> There are two instrumental numbers, the opening Sinfonia<sup>[16]</sup> in the style of a French overture, and the pastoral Pifa, often called the "pastoral symphony", at the mid-point of Part I.<sup>[18]</sup> In Part I, the *Messiah's* coming and the virgin birth are predicted by the Old Testament prophets. The annunciation to the shepherds of the birth of the Christ is represented in the words of Luke's gospel. Part II covers Christ's passion and his death, his resurrection and ascension, the first spreading of the gospel through the world, and a definitive statement of God's glory summarized in the "Hallelujah". Part III begins with the promise of redemption, followed by a prediction of the day of judgment and the "general resurrection", ending with the final victory over sin and death and the acclamation of Christ.<sup>[19]</sup>

In most of Handel's oratorios, the soloists dominate and the choir sings only brief choruses. But in *Messiah*, "the chorus propels the work forward with great emotional impact and uplifting messages." (Cummings).



Page of handwritten score by Handel

In this collaborative performance, we have elected to do only the portion of the oratorio known as the "Christmas" portion, with the much-loved addition of the "Hallelujah" chorus, despite its placement at the end of the second part of the three-part oratorio. Some 40 years after *Messiah's* premiere, English musicologist Charles Burney wrote, "This great work has been heard in all parts of the kingdom with increasing reverence and delight; it has fed the hungry, clothed the naked, fostered the orphan and enriched succeeding managers of the oratorios, more than any single production in this or any other country." Those words still ring as true as ever in our current 21<sup>st</sup> century world of most highly respected and widely performed choral and orchestral masterworks.

In 1823, Beethoven proclaimed Handel to be the  
**"greatest composer that ever lived."**

*British Library / Bridgeman Art Library International*

Mozart paid Handel the supreme compliment of reorchestrating *Messiah* in 1789. Even Mozart, however, confessed himself to be humble in the face of Handel's genius. He insisted that any alterations to Handel's score should not be interpreted as an effort to improve the music.

**"Handel knows better than any of us what will make an effect,"**

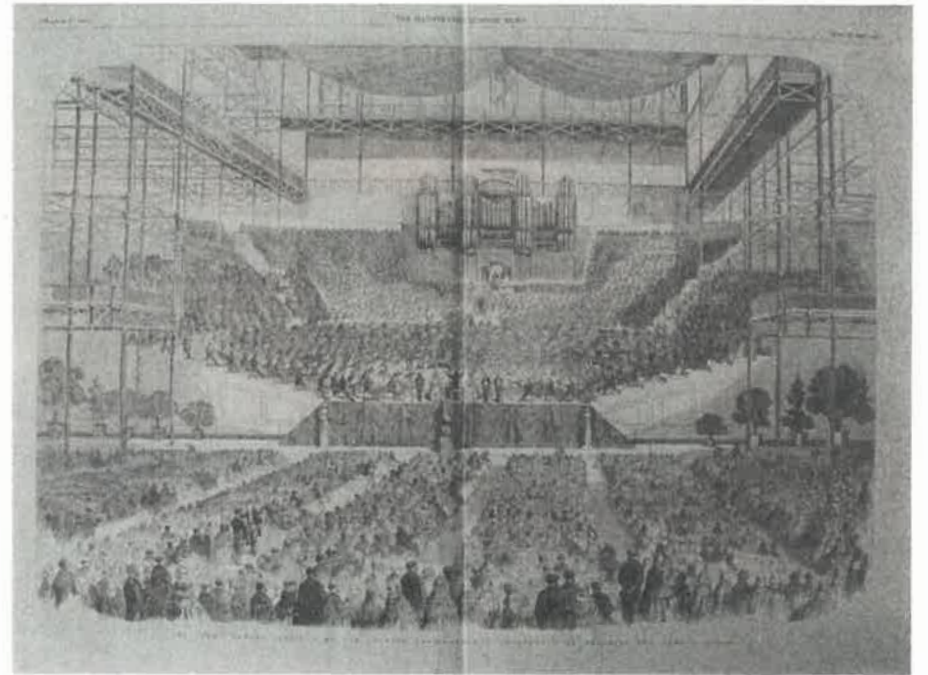
Mozart said.

**"When he chooses, he strikes like a thunderbolt."**

- C. Bergan, program notes

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*Handel Festival at the Crystal Palace, 1857*