

Which Handel *Messiah* for Rikkyo?

A comparison of three editions and a proposal for performance

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What is “Handel’s Messiah?” Seemingly a facetious question, it is actually one that should be asked more often. Performances given by different groups of “Messiah” can sound as if they were written by different composers. Depending upon the number and type of performers, and version of the score, two performances of the same work can and do sound completely different. One performance may even include movements that are not performed at another. What about Messiah as performed annually by forces from Rikkyo University? One can assume that many people attending this concert are repeaters, and may be veterans of the performance themselves. If one further assumes that many attendees have never heard a live performance other than Rikkyo’s and do not listen to various types of Messiah recordings that they then would assume the Rikkyo performance to be close to what Handel had in mind when he composed the work. But is this actually the case? Or, to repeat the question – what is “Handel’s Messiah?” This paper will present a description of the way in which “Messiah” was performed during Handel’s lifetime, as well as an explanation of the changes it underwent after his death. It will be demonstrated that the Rikkyo performance as it presently stands is actually a considerably different work than Handel’s original composition. This is not a negative judgment; it should also be stated that Rikkyo’s performance is not unique in this aspect. A glance at the internet shows numerous performances in Japan. One Messiah homepage lists 41 performances in 2006 alone.¹ Groups of various sizes and abilities perform the work and their performances likely range from more or less authentic (Handelian) to greatly altered versions.

***Messiah* performances at Rikkyo University**

For those readers who have never attended a Rikkyo “Messiah” performance, a brief description of the tradition as it stood in 2005 will be given before proceeding to examine the tradition of *Messiah* performances in Handel’s own time. In December,

¹ 久松祥三、「ヘンデル作曲 メサイア 演奏会情報」。2007年1月3日。
<http://www.gregorio.jp/messiah/messiah2006.html> (accessed 2006年12月)

2005, the 44th annual performance of Handel's "Messiah" was performed by groups from Rikkyo University. The performance took place at the Tokyo Geijutsu Gekijo, a hall seating 1999 persons. On stage were approximately 250 performers, including 4 professional soloists, a full-size modern orchestra, and large chorus. The orchestra was under the direction of Sato Kotaru (佐藤功太郎), who was at that time only the second conductor in the history of Rikkyo's Messiah (his predecessor was 金子登). At least three different editions of the score were in use: Prout (1902)² for the orchestra, Barenreiter (1972)³ and Kirisutokyou Ongaku Shuppan (1948/1960)⁴ for the chorus (singers choose their own edition). In addition, vocal soloists, and the harpsichordist and organist appear to have used other editions. A recording of the 2005 performance shows Mr. Sato's interpretation to be on the Romantic side, with generally slow tempos, large ritardandos at the end of choruses, etc. This type of performance is likely close to what one could have heard when Prout's edition was first published at the beginning of the 20th-century. What would Handel have thought of this style of performance? That is impossible to say, of course. Is the Prout edition a valid one for use in the 21st century? This question can be answered with a fair degree of accuracy. One needs only to make a comparison of Prout and other, more recent, editions to determine what Prout changed. Before going into this issue, however, a brief background of Messiah, as it originally appeared, will be given.

***Messiah* during Handel's lifetime**

It is a well known story that Handel composed "Messiah" in just over three weeks during the summer of 1741. It was first performed in the Great Music Hall in Fishamble Street, Dublin, as a charity matinee concert on April 13, 1742. The audience numbered approximately 700 people.⁵ The performers for the Dublin performances were as follows:

1. Chorus: the combined choirs of the two cathedrals in Dublin, a total of approximately 24 singers. The choirs were composed of men and boys, and should be

2 George Frideric Handel, *The Messiah*, ed. by Ebenezer Prout (1902, reprint full score, Miami: Edwin F. Kalmus & Co.).

3 George Frideric Handel, *Messiah*, ed. by Max Schneider (piano/vocal score, Basel: Bärenreiter Kassel, 1972).

4 George Frideric Handel, *Händel's Messiah*, ed. by Kioka Eisaburo 木岡英三郎 (piano/vocal score, Tokyo: Kirisutokyo Ongaku Shuppan 東京: 基督教音楽出版, second edition, 1960).

5 Donald Burrows, *Handel Messiah*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, reprinted 1997), p. 17.

considered professional organizations, rather than groups of amateur singers.⁶

2. Orchestra: Handel originally composed the work for strings only, as he was planning to perform it far from his normal base of London. He later added oboes (doubling the violins or sopranos) and bassoons (doubling the string bass lines in places). Alfred Mann says he knew there would be at least one good civic trumpeter in Dublin, thus the famous solo trumpet line in “The trumpet shall sound”. A second, simpler trumpet part was also added.⁷ Add to this the obligatory continuo keyboard instrument (harpsichord and/or organ) and you have the original forces needed to perform Messiah.

3. Vocal soloists: two professional female singers traveled to Dublin to perform with Handel; the male solos were all sung by members of the choir. Some of the alto solos were sung by the male altos of the choir, rather than the female professional.⁸

It can be deduced from this list that many conventions we associate with modern Messiah performances do not date from Handel’s time. These include the time of year for the performance: originally Lent, now most frequently near Christmas; the number of performers: probably a maximum of 60⁹, and the allocation of the solo movements (now most often sung by four professionals who do not sing with the chorus).

Messiah was first performed in London in March 1743, and then again in 1745. The 1745 performance is of interest, in that Handel revised several movements, probably at the suggestion of Messiah librettist Jennens. A new setting of “Their sound is gone out,” was composed for the chorus.¹⁰ The text was originally set for solo voice in the Dublin premiere. Other changes made by Handel for this performance were the restoration of the A section of the aria “How beautiful are the feet” and the re-composition of the aria “Rejoice greatly” to duple meter from the original triple meter.¹¹

Further performances did not take place until 1749. Though *Messiah* as performed during this season was basically the same as that of 1745, Handel did add the markings *con ripieno* and *senza ripieno* to the score. He apparently had a large string section in 1749, and all of his oratorios performed that year bear this marking.

6 Leonard Van Camp, *A Practical Guide for Performing, Teaching and Singing Messiah*, (Dayton: Roger Dean Publishing Company, 1993), p. 4.

7 Alfred Mann, *Bach and Handel, Choral Performance Practice*, (Chapel Hill: Hinshaw Music Inc., 1992), p. 42.

8 Burrows, *Handel Messiah*, p. 19.

9 George Frideric Handel, *Messiah*, ed. by Clifford Bartlett, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. v.

10 Burrows, *Handel Messiah*, p. 34.

11 Ibid.

It would suggest that he allowed the extra string players to perform only when the score was so marked.¹² These markings remain in modern scores, and can be misinterpreted by modern-day performers.

Handel's last significant changes to the score of *Messiah* came in the following year, when many solo movements were reallocated. In this year he had six soloists, including the famed Italian alto castrato Gaetano Guadagni. Two new settings of arias were written for him that had formerly been for other voice parts.¹³

This very brief outline of changes made to the score of *Messiah* by Handel show us several things. Some aspects of *Messiah* performances evolved during Handel's lifetime, while others remained virtually unchanged. Elements that evolved include the vocal parts, particularly the issue of which solo voice sang which movements.¹⁴ Instrumental parts reflect far fewer changes. The string group does most of the accompanying of the vocal parts. Oboes and bassoons were added for color, but do not have independent parts. Trumpets and timpani appear in a few movements. This very simple orchestral sound remained unchanged until after the death of Handel. Also basically unchanged was the number of performers required: the combined chorus and orchestra usually included about 60 members. Perhaps we can answer the question of "what is *Messiah*," at least during the lifetime of the composer. What it became after his death is another matter.

Changes made to *Messiah* after the death of Handel: A. Larger performing forces

There are two aspects in the evolution of *Messiah* after Handel. The first is an increase in the number of performers, while the second is the addition of instruments not included in Handel's original orchestra. Rather soon after Handel's death in 1759 the size of the chorus began to increase. In 1771 records show it consisted of 30 professional singers and 26 non-paid volunteer singers. This was the first time the chorus in a *Messiah* performance outnumbered the orchestra.¹⁵ The trend was to continue on to amazing levels. In 1784 a Handel commemoration concert included a performance of *Messiah* at Westminster Abbey that had 500 performers, or roughly ten

¹² Ibid., p. 36.

¹³ Ibid., p. 37.

¹⁴ The Oxford edition, for example, includes five different versions of the aria "But who may abide." Each variant was prepared by Handel for different performances. They include versions for alto solo (an aria), bass solo (an aria version and a recitative version, and two soprano solo versions (arias in G minor and A minor).

¹⁵ Burrows, *Handel Messiah*, p. 48.

times the number of Handel's day.¹⁶ This performance was in commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the death of Handel, and its sheer size seems to have changed the basic idea of a Messiah performance.

By the time of the 100th anniversary of Handel's death in 1859, performing forces for *Messiah* had exceeded even the giant proportions of the 1784 Westminster Abbey performances. Perhaps more spectacle than concert, the performance took place in the Crystal Palace before an audience of up to 28,000 people. Performers included a chorus of over 2,700, an orchestra of 400 and a large concert hall organ.¹⁷ Nor was this the end of the increase in performers. Choirs of 4,000-5,000 and orchestras of 500 were known at the Crystal Palace concerts in the days before World War I.¹⁸ Clearly, the tempi and style at which a chorus of 24 professional singers can perform is quite different from that of a group of 4,000 amateur singers. Fortunately for Handel's music, however, there were some who began to campaign for a return to a more authentic style of performance for *Messiah*. George Bernard Shaw wrote the following review of the 1891 Handel Festival performance in London. "Why, instead of wasting huge sums on the multitudinous dullness of Handel Festival does not somebody set up a thoroughly rehearsed and exhaustively studied performance of the Messiah in St James's Hall with a chorus of twenty capable artists?"¹⁹ Perhaps the first attempt at this "new" style of authentic performance was directed by Arthur Henry Mann in 1894 in King's College Chapel, Cambridge. His performance was based on a thorough study of the original *Messiah* manuscripts, and aimed to recreate a performance style as close to that of Handel's day as possible.²⁰ It wasn't until the 1950's, however that the idea of authentic performances began to spread, leading to a decrease in the size of performing forces. And with the Baroque performance practice revival of the 1970's and 1980's, concerts and recordings aiming to recreate the sound of Handel's day proliferated. At the present time everything from fairly exact reproductions of Handel's Dublin premiere performance to giant performances featuring thousands of singers can be found in any given year.

Changes made to *Messiah* after the death of Handel: B. Additional instruments

¹⁶ Jacobi lists the performers as including 253 orchestra members and 257 singers. The orchestra included 157 string players, 26 oboes, 26 bassoons, 6 flutes, 1 double bassoon, 12 trumpets, 12 horns, and a "collection of kettledrums and a Tower drum." It required four conductors to control the masses. (p. 84)

¹⁷ Peter Jacobi, *The Messiah Book*, (New York: St. Martin's Press), p. 93-94.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 94.

¹⁹ Burrows, *Handel Messiah*, p. 52.

²⁰ Ibid.

As explained above, *Messiah* was written for a very basic orchestra. In the years after Handel's death, a second type of change was made in the performance of the work. Not only were orchestras bigger than in Handel's day, they also began to include instrumental parts not in Handel's original score. Of many arrangements made by various persons, two major versions of *Messiah* with additional instrumental parts will be examined here.

I. The "Mozart" edition of *Messiah*

In 1789 a performance of *Messiah* took place in Vienna. This performance utilized an arrangement by Mozart that had been commissioned by Baron Gottfried van Swieten (1733-1803). Sung in German, the performance included instruments that were not in the original score. We know that Mozart admired Handel's composition, so why did he see fit to rearrange the music? Firstly, the musical tastes of Dublin in 1742 those of Vienna in 1789 were considerably different. Ideas of the ideal orchestral sound had changed, and it can be assumed that without Mozart's adaptation the Viennese public wouldn't have found Handel's music as palatable as they did. The orchestral sound of contemporary Vienna included the element of "harmony instruments" that were not a part of a Handelian orchestra. These harmony instruments consisted of a mixed ensemble of woodwinds and brass instruments.²¹ It should be remembered that in Handel's *Messiah* score there were only two woodwind parts, and that these merely doubled the string lines. The only other non-stringed instruments were trumpet and timpani, which appeared in a few of the movements.

It should not be thought, however, that Mozart simply rearranged *Messiah* to suit his own tastes. Van Swieten first had the idea to edit the work,²² revising a previous German translation for the purpose. Further, van Swieten had a working score prepared for Mozart's use. Handel's original parts were copied onto a 12-staff score, leaving several empty staves for the use of Mozart's additions.²³ Thus, Mozart worked within a rather strict framework comprising Handel's original composition and van Swieten's score decisions on the size and composition of the orchestra.

What is the basic nature of the alterations Mozart performed on *Messiah*? I studied each movement of the work, comparing Mozart's additional parts with Handel's original, as well as with Prout's later edition (see below). What Mozart did with

²¹ Christoph Wolff, *Mozart's Messiah: "The Spirit of Handel" (from van Swieten's Hands)*, in *Essays in Honor of Paul Henry Lang: Music and Civilization*, ed. by Edmond Strainchamps and Maria Rika Maniates with Christopher Hatch, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1984), p. 3.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 1.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

Messiah was pure genius, in my opinion. All of Handel's original string part writing remains. The vocal parts also, except for their translation into German. The great bulk of the additions lie with the harmony instruments,²⁴ but these new parts never obscure Handel's original. In all cases they delicately overlie Handel's own lines, adding a shade of color not to be found in the original. The end result is still *Messiah*, but with a late-18th century Viennese accent. Though listeners may well prefer Handel's original, it is an indisputable fact that Mozart's additions to the original score are the equal of the original, and combine with it to give a new perspective on the work.

Two basic types of additions can be found in the Mozart *Messiah*: (1) parts that were newly composed by Mozart; (2) instrumental parts derived from elements of Handel's score. The former type adds Mozart's own musical commentary to Handel's music, while the latter serves to amplify Handel's original writing. A very clear example of both techniques can be found in the Part II tenor aria "Thou shalt break them" This aria, as Handel composed it, is in a three-part texture. (see musical example 1) Mozart did some straight-forward adding to these lines; a new viola part throughout, and two short sections of new violin parts (measures 40-42, 53-56) were included. But these are simple harmonic filling – the string parts are otherwise original.²⁵ To these basic parts Mozart added completely new lines for five instruments (one flute, two clarinets and two fagotts). Here the additions become interesting; in these parts we can clearly see Mozart's two styles of writing. From measures one through ten the winds play a simple harmonic part. A glance at the score shows seemingly irreconcilable differences between Handel and Mozart. Handel's lines are jagged and rhythmic, while Mozart's are made of long notes and gently descending lines. Yet heard together they form a perfect union. Mozart knits Handel's lines together with his harmony, but derives part of his music from Handel. The chromatic scale in measure four is certainly derived from Handel's measure one violin part. (see musical example 2) The second style of added lines can be found in measures 23-25, 36-52 and 65 to the end. Here Mozart takes melodic motives directly from Handel and uses them in his own wind parts. But rather than simply doubling the string parts, Mozart imitates Handel's themes a beat behind the string parts. The listener hears a dialogue between the old and new parts. (see musical example 3) These two types of added

²⁴ In a few movements Mozart also added viola parts where none originally existed. The solo portion of "O thou that tallest good tidings to Zion" originally had no viola part; Mozart added one, most likely to fill out the harmony. In any case, in Handel's original the viola enters on bar 108 with the chorus tenors.

²⁵ My analysis of the Mozart score extends only to the actual notes, not slurring or articulation marks.

parts can be found throughout Mozart's *Messiah* edition.

II. The Prout edition of *Messiah*

My reason for focusing on the Prout edition of *Messiah* is a simple one – it is the version Rikkyo has used for its *Messiah* performances. When asked suddenly in July of 2006 to conduct the December 12, 2006 Rikkyo *Messiah* performance, it became imperative to know exactly what edition the performers were using, as well as to understand the strengths and weaknesses of that edition.²⁶ My approach to the study was as follows.

1. A study of Prout's own preface was made. Here Prout explains his reasons for producing a new version of *Messiah* in 1902, his editorial choices, and reveals some of his biases.

2. A note-by-note comparison of the Prout edition was made to two other editions. Though sometimes a tedious process (and one that took two months to complete), it was most revealing to watch as Prout freely re-arranged the score. In the case of the string parts, I compared Prout to the Oxford University Press edition – thought to be one of the best scholarly editions available at present.²⁷ This part of the study revealed Prout to be faithful to Handel in one aspect (the actual notes of the string parts), but rather unfaithful in another (the issue of slur marks, dynamics and other articulation marks). Since Prout based his wind parts not on Handel, but on Mozart, all of the notes in these parts were compared against Mozart's edition of *Messiah*.²⁸ Here I found Prout to be extremely free, recomposing whole phrases, omitting melodic lines, and switching Mozart's designated wind parts to other instruments (flute parts played by clarinets, for example).

To demonstrate Prout's editorial techniques, the aria "Thou shalt break them" will again be used. A summary of Prout's treatment of this aria is as follows.

1. 1. String parts. The upper and lower string parts are faithful to Handel only with respect to the notes. Prout did not preserve Handel's articulation or slurring, choosing to add accent marks, slurs and dynamics freely throughout the music. (see example 4) And though he claims to respect and preserve Handel's string parts, he included a viola

²⁶ Long-time conductor Sato Koutaro had died in June, necessitating the finding of a conductor for 2006.

²⁷ This edition, edited by Clifford Bartlett, includes all known variants to every movement. It was produced after an exhaustive comparison of Handel's composing manuscript (British Library R.M.20.f.2) and his working score (Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Tenbury 346-7). +biblio info here

²⁸ George Frederick Handel, *Der Messias*, arr. by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, (in *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart Neue Ausgabe sämtlicher Werke*, Serie X: Supplement, Basel: Bärenreiter Kassel, 1961).

part not in the original music. (Mozart also added a viola part, but Prout completely rewrote Mozart's part in his own version).

Articulation marks, slurs and dynamics have been freely added. This is another large deviation from Prout's stated policy.

2. Wind parts. Though retaining a wind section, Prout rewrites most of Mozart's music. What is left is a part for winds (two oboes, two clarinets, two fagotts) that mainly doubles Handel's string parts. Very small smatterings of Mozart remain intact, but the replacement of the flute with two oboes changes the sound of the wind section considerably. Unlike Mozart's very original additions to Handel's score, Prout's additions are redundant, heavy, and totally unnecessary. (see musical example 4)

3. Solo voice part. Identical to Handel.

To summarize, the only pure Handel in the movement is the solo voice part. The upper and lower string parts are accurate as far as note go, but are slurred and articulated freely by Prout. The viola part is neither Handel nor Mozart. The wind parts are also neither Handel nor Mozart, but dull Prout originals. This type of treatment not unique to this aria – it can be found throughout his edition of *Messiah*.

Since the 1950's, scholarly editions of works from the Baroque period (1600-1750) have been published in great numbers. Additionally, the revival of Baroque performance techniques in the 1970's and '80's produced a general consensus that the best way to perform a piece of music is recreate, as far as is practical, the composer's original music in all aspects (including notes, slurring, articulation marks, embellishments, dynamics, instrumentation, etc.) With several centuries intervening between the present day and the Baroque Period, there will always be room for improvement as new discoveries are made, and basic assumptions change. Still, the goal is usually to accurately reproduce earlier music. This was obviously not the case between the death of Handel and the middle of the 20th century. As was seen above, Mozart (or his patron von Swieten, at least) felt it necessary to update *Messiah* so that contemporary Viennese audiences could appreciate it. Being a first class composer himself, Mozart's additions to Handel's score are of the highest level. Whether or not one agrees with the basic concept of adding to *Messiah*, Mozart's work is sound. Prout, on the other hand, had two goals that conflict with each other. He stated in his preface that he wished to provide an accurate *Messiah* that was faithful to Handel's original.²⁹ Yet he did not restore the Handel's original wind parts. Rather, he retained those

²⁹ Prout's preface p. iv: "The first and most important rule that I have laid down for myself is, that the most absolute respect must be shown to Handel's text and to his intentions..."

portions of Mozart that he liked, and rewrote the rest. Unfortunately for us, Prout was not a first rate composer (his works are said to lack originality³⁰), and his rewrites of Mozart are simply substandard and dull. Though there was a need for Prout's edition when it was published over a century ago, his work has been superceded by at least two generations of scholarly editions.

Conclusion

What answer can be made to the opening question of this paper – “what is Handel's *Messiah*”? It should be apparent to the reader that the answer is “whatever you want it to be.” Performers can choose from scholarly editions and perform with forces matching those of Handel's time. Or they can choose Mozart and recreate a late 18th-century sound. Perhaps they prefer a heavy Romantic period sound and choose Prout's edition. Whatever the decision, serious thought and planning is required before choosing an edition and performing style. What then, of Rikkyo University's continuing tradition of performing *Messiah*? From my experience of preparing for the 2006 performance I would offer the following options.

1. An authentic Handelian performance. This would entail choosing a single type of *Messiah* (Dublin version? 1749 edition?) and attempting to recreate a period sound. It would mean greatly reducing the size of the chorus, as well as the hiring of an orchestra that performs with authentic instruments and techniques. Such a performance would leave out many Rikkyo student groups, and is probably not a practical option.

2. A more Handelian performance than at present, using modern instruments and a large chorus. Lively tempos and the use of only instruments found in Handel's score would give a more authentic sound than at present, but would allow most Rikkyo student groups presently participating to continue in the performance. All wind parts except for oboes, fagotts and trumpets would be eliminated, however. A professional harpsichordist and organist would continue to be needed.

3. An authentic Mozart edition performance. Authenticity would require singing in German, as was done in Vienna. Also necessary would be a highly skilled trombone section, for these instruments often double the chorus in the Viennese choral tradition. As was done in Mozart's time, certain parts of some choruses would be sung by soloists only. For a continuo instrument one would choose between pianoforte (an early piano) and positive organ. The use of harpsichord with this performance would be anachronistic.

³⁰ *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd edition., s.v. “Ebenezer Prout,” by Rosemary Williamson.

4. A more Mozartean performance, but sung in English. This would allow the present size group (chorus and orchestra) to continue to perform as at present. Certain Viennese traditions, such as the doubling of chorus parts by trombones, might be omitted. Depending upon the relative strengths of the trumpet and horn sections in a given performance year, decisions might have to be made concerning the orchestration of “The trumpet shall sound.”

5. Continuing use of the Prout edition. For the reasons given above, I do not believe that performing from the Prout edition is an option for any group in the 21st century. It may well have been the best choice for performers in the 1960’s, but has been surpassed many times over by more recent editions. If, however, Prout is chosen, the use of harpsichord continuo should be discontinued. In his own preface, Prout states that the wind parts in his edition are there to replace the original harpsichord part.

My final point concerning the Rikkyo *Messiah* performance involves the omission of selected movements. In the Rikkyo University performance eight movements out of a total of fifty-three are not performed. Whatever the original reason for this decision, it must be acknowledged that such cuts do great musical damage to the flow of *Messiah*, and were unknown in Handel’s day. Part III, in particular, loses four of its nine movements, which interrupts both the musical and theological flow of the work. The practice of cutting movements should at least be reconsidered to see if some or all of the presently lost movements could be restored.

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