

2020 HANDEL SINGING COMPETITION NOTES FOR SINGERS

Thank you for your interest in the 2020 Handel Singing Competition, one of the world's leading competitions for baroque singers. In 2019 we had a record number of applications – 170 singers from 25 countries, as far afield as Australia and Argentina. Alumni of the Handel Singing Competition have gone on to major success in their careers.

Here are further details to help you with your application. Please note that the Semi-Final and Final are both open to the public as part of the London Handel Festival, and will be held at St. George's, Hanover Square in London, Handel's own church.

INTRODUCTION

The Handel Singing Competition is open to all singers aged between 23-34 on 1 February 2020, and is a showcase for historically informed performances of Handel's music.

After a pre-selection based on video or sound recordings submitted with the application, all the remaining rounds are in London.

Pre-Selection all candidates must supply a good quality sound recording or video of them performing a short aria by Handel, ideally to include the recit for that aria although this is not compulsory. The aria should be at least 3 minutes long (including any da capo). The recording should ideally be at baroque pitch with harpsichord or baroque ensemble/orchestra, but a piano at modern pitch or keyboard adjusted to baroque pitch is also allowed. It can be a concert performance or specially recorded for the application.

First Round (Craxton Studios, daytime) max 90 singers selected to be heard live or digitally by the panel. Two arias by Handel (either sacred or secular), one with its preceding recit. Must be performed in the original key and original language (Italian, English, German). Maximum time- 10 minutes. Video recordings can be used at this stage.

Semi Final (St George's, Hanover Square, 6pm) max 12 singers invited to perform with a harpsichordist, two contrasting Handel arias up to 15 minutes.

Final (St George's, Hanover Square, 7pm) max 6 singers invited to return, perform an all-Handel programme with London Handel Orchestra, conducted by Laurence Cummings. A contrasting programme up to 18 minutes (no specific number of arias required).

If you are successful at reaching the First Round, you will receive further details.

APPLICATION DEADLINE

Sunday 1 December 2019

RESULTS OF PRESELECTION ANNOUNCED

Friday 20 December 2019

FIRST ROUND

Thursday 6 - Saturday 8 February 2020

SEMI FINAL

Friday 6 March 2020

FINAL

Thursday 26 March 2020

ADJUDICATORS

Ian Partridge, Catherine Denley, Michael George (all rounds)
Clemens Birnbaum (Director, Halle Handel Festival) – Final
Other names to be announced

Past adjudicators in recent years have included Jane Glover, Rosemary Joshua, Lawrence Zazzo, John Mark Ainsley and Iestyn Davies.

PRIZES

First Prize - £5,000; Second Prize - £2,000; Audience Prize - £300;
Finalists Awards - £300.

All Finalists in the Handel Singing Competition are also guaranteed lunchtime recitals in the 2021 London Handel Festival, and many past finalists are also asked to perform solos in other prestigious concerts during the Festival and in other Handel Festivals abroad. For example, the 2019 London Handel Festival featured no fewer than 20 past Finalists and there are also recent Finalists performing at the Handel Festivals both in Goettingen and Halle. The winner of this year's competition has also been invited to perform the solos in *Messiah* with the Huddersfield Choral Society, under the direction of Jane Glover, and to present a prestigious recital with the City Music Society.

APPLICATION & PRESELECTION

Please apply and pay via the London Handel Festival website. There is a two-stage process – firstly you must apply via the event and pay, secondly please fill in the application form as indicated. You must submit a sound or video recording of a Handel aria with your application – please see the application form for full details. Please include a short paragraph or a few sentences directly here from two referees (in their own words) and fill in their e-mail so that we may contact them if required. One of the referees should be your current or most recent singing teacher, the other one can be someone you have worked with professionally i.e. opera director, and does not need to be a singer.

You will need to submit your repertoire choices for the First Round at this stage – please note that your proposed programme should be 10 minutes in total, to include both arias and the recit. You may repeat the music from your video or sound recording in another round if it is eligible, but no music may be repeated from the First Round to the Semi-Final and from the Semi-Final to the Final. You do not have to attend the First Round in person, you may choose to submit video files instead (no sound files allowed for the First Round), but these need to fulfil the requirements of two arias and a recit and this time it is compulsory for the accompaniment to be a harpsichord or baroque ensemble/orchestra.

Please note that you will not be required to submit your repertoire choices for the Semi-Final or Final until you are informed if you are through to the First Round on 20 December, but please note that we will need this information quite soon after, so please think about likely repertoire you may wish to present at each stage.

For the First Round, you are required to sing two arias by Handel (either sacred or secular), one with its preceding recit, up to a maximum of 10 minutes. Accompaniment is harpsichord at A=415, and the London Handel Festival will allocate an accompanist.

For the Semi-Final there is a maximum time of 15 minutes allocated to each singer. You are invited to submit a contrasting programme comprising one recitative and aria plus a second aria – no further music allowed, all by Handel. One aria should be in English. All singers are required to attend in person. Accompaniment as for First Round.

For the Final there is a maximum time of 18 minutes allocated to each singer. You are invited to submit a contrasting programme, all music by Handel – there is no specific number of pieces required but no arias should be from *Messiah*. All singers are accompanied by the London Handel Orchestra, directed by Laurence Cummings.

You will be informed of the results of the pre-selection by 20 December and all those who are not successful will be provided with some feedback at this stage.

REASONS TO APPLY

Both the Semi-Final and Final are open to the general public as part of the annual London Handel Festival and are well attended, including by many agents and promoters. Past finalists of the Competition include Iestyn Davies, Ruby Hughes, Lucy Crowe, Tim Mead, Sophie Junker, Anna Starushkevych and Grace Davidson.

“The London Handel Singing Competition was for me the perfect platform from which I was able to demonstrate what I thought I could do; I’m not a fan of competition in singing but this competition allows you to focus on the repertoire choices and stylistic decisions you make, first and foremost. For me it was absolutely the turning point. I secured an agent from my performance which opened a new chapter in my singing career at the time. It really was the taking part that counted; I didn’t win!”

Iestyn Davies MBE, 2004 runner-up

“It came as a big surprise to win the first prize and audience prize all those years ago. Singing in the Handel competition was a super opportunity to focus on one glorious composer and his unique style, exploring his heavenly musical output. I learned so much about Baroque style and vocal technique and it gave me a solid foundation from which to build later repertoire.” *Ruby Hughes, 2009 winner*

“After a few years as a postgraduate student, winning the Handel Singing Competition was for me a great platform that opened many doors as a professional singer here in the UK. It also meant to me great recognition and projection here and abroad, where the HSC is very much appreciated as well.” *Josep-Ramon Olivé, 2015 winner*

“Competitions are a real asset to young singers, and act as a wonderful seal of approval as we continue to apply for the next project or audition. It is wonderful to have the recognition of such a well-known festival to recommend me further as a performer in the competitive world of singing” *Helen Charlston, 2018 winner*

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

1. Is repertoire limited to opera or are sacred arias allowed?
You may perform both sacred or secular music in all rounds of the competition – the only restriction is no arias from the Messiah are allowed in the Final
2. Do I have to sing the full da capos in all my arias?
The competition is for historically informed performance, and therefore all da capos must be sung in all of the live rounds. Da capos do not need to be submitted as part of the digital files for the pre-selection
3. Is there a preferred language choice for the arias?
You must always sing in the original language used by Handel but there is no restriction in language choice (Italian, German, English) apart from you MUST sing one aria in English in the semi-final
4. Is the first round open to the public?
No, you perform only to the three adjudicators
5. In what circumstances can I get a refund if I am not able to attend?
We only offer a refund in due to illness, which has to be supported by a doctor’s note

6. Can I bring my own accompanist for any of the rounds?
No, everyone has to use one of our official accompanists
7. What sort of keyboard instrument is used for the accompaniment?
The competition is for historically informed performance so a double manual harpsichord at a-415 is used for the First Round and Semi-Final
8. Is there warm up space at Craxton Studios?
Unfortunately the venue is not able to provide space for warming up at the moment but we are working on finding a solution and will let the 90 successful singers know
9. Will I get to have a run through with my harpsichordist in the first round?
You get a 10 minute run through directly before you go on
10. Can I rehearse with my accompanist in advance?
Yes – you will be supplied with their contact info on the schedule
11. What format can I use to submit the recordings in the application?
Please include a link to your recordings in the application form
12. If I supplied a video with my application, can that be used for the first round?
If you supplied a suitable video recording in the application you only need to send a second one for the first round (10 minutes performance in total)
13. What is the age limit for this competition?
You must be between 23 – 34 on 1 February 2020, sorry there are no exceptions
14. How can I book tickets for events in the London Handel Festival?
This is possible through the main website - <https://www.london-handel-festival.com/> but please note that booking is not open until mid-December for the general public
15. When will you let us know the results of the pre-selection?
You will be contacted by 20 December
16. What times are the First Round, Semi-Final and Final?
The First Round is held during the day, the Semi-Final is at 6pm, the Final at 7pm
17. What kind of references are required?
We need two references from a current or recent singing teacher or vocal coach. Please supply text from them in their own words (a few sentences or short paragraph will suffice) and paste this directly into the application form. We will also need their e-mails in case we need to contact them
18. When do I need to let you know my repertoire choices for the Semi-Final?
We require this information shortly after 20 December when we will inform everyone if they have been successful in reaching the First Round
19. Can I repeat repertoire from one round to the next?
You can repeat music from the sound or video files to the First Round or Semi-Final, but after this stage no further repeats are allowed
20. If I get through to the Semi-Final, can my friends and family come and watch?
Yes, we give an allocation of complimentary tickets to each performer and all full-time students with ID also get free tickets. Tickets are also available to buy (see Q14)