

Your chance to join in Handel's *Messiah* in a performance from Handel's own church!

Each year at Christmas, the London Handel Festival presents *Messiah* from St George's church in Hanover Square, London, where Handel worshipped. This year, because of restrictions around Covid-19 we are doing things slightly differently. On 3 December, we will have soloists and a small professional baroque orchestra in the church playing live and all choruses pre-recorded by six choirs – five partner choirs and a special 'all comers sing at home' chorus of amateur singers. The whole event will be live streamed around the world.

We would like to invite you/members of your choir/choral society to join our virtual 'Sing at Home' chorus. If you love singing, love Handel's *Messiah*, and have some choral experience, then this event is for you!

How will it work?

When you become a member of the 'Sing at Home' chorus you will be asked to prepare and record three choruses from *Messiah* - 'And the glory', 'Worthy is the Lamb' and the magnificent 'Hallelujah!' chorus. Your recording will be combined with the videos from the other members to create a professionally produced video, set against the perfect backdrop of Handel's own church, and that will be broadcast live as part of the performance on 3 December.

How will you help me prepare?

To help prepare for this unique event, you can virtually "attend" three pre-recorded rehearsal sessions during September with our Musical Director and renowned baroque conductor, Laurence Cummings – once they are ready, we will send you a link, you can download to watch any time before recording.

A specially recorded backing track prepared by the London Handel Orchestra will also be available in early September together with clear and easy instructions for choir members on how to record and submit their videos. The backing track features full baroque orchestra (at baroque pitch) but no singing. In addition, choir members will also receive a special invitation to live panel discussions later this autumn, with Laurence Cummings and some of the world's leading experts on Handel's *Messiah*. You will need to provide your own *Messiah* score; most editions are fine.

What if I've never participated in a virtual choir before?

We would be delighted to welcome singers who have not yet had the opportunity to be part of a virtual choir. As long as you are enthusiastic, keen to practice and can find a suitable place to record yourself it shouldn't be a problem. Simple instructions will be provided on the best way for you, or a member of your family or a friend to make your recording.

What are the deadlines for this project?

We will send out audio and video files to help you sing along, rehearse and prepare from early September. All recordings need to be submitted **by 4 October** to be professionally edited to create a virtual chorus of 250 voices.

What is special about this project?

This is the very first project of its type, and a unique opportunity for you to add your voice to an event which will be broadcast live from Handel's own church. The musical support for the project is provided by the excellent London Handel Orchestra, a specialist professional baroque ensemble and Laurence Cummings, one of the leading conductors in the world for Handel.

Who else is involved in this project?

As well as the 'Sing at Home' choir, we are working with five other choral partners to produce recordings of the remainder of the choruses. On the evening of the live performance the London Handel Orchestra and professional soloists, past winners of our prestigious international Handel Singing Competition, will perform the solo arias and orchestral passages live from Handel's church.

What is the fee for taking part?

As you will no doubt appreciate, these are challenging times for our musical community and we are therefore charging a price of £25 per singer. By participating you would be helping support the London Handel Festival and the musicians who make up the professional orchestra.

Will I be able to watch the final performance?

The whole event will be live streamed (with virtual choruses added) on social media, so that viewers all over the world can watch for free. It will be available for several weeks after the event, so your family and friends can watch it at their own leisure. You will be sent details of the event in advance to share.

What kind of singers are you looking for?

Anyone who has some choral experience, enthusiasm and familiarity with *Messiah* is welcome to take part. We welcome tenors and basses in particular, and we are keen to make this a truly international project, so singers from countries outside the United Kingdom are warmly encouraged to take part.

How can I book?

Simple, click on this link and then on the virtual *Messiah* event and then select your relevant voice part. You will need to create an account with us if you have not booked with us before, but the process is quick and straightforward.

<https://www.london-handel-festival.com/whats-on/events-calendar/>

Who can I contact if I have further questions?

Please e-mail boxoffice@londonhandelfestival.org.uk. Please note that we are a small organisation (but with big ambition...), so it may take a day to respond.

London Handel Festival - <https://www.london-handel-festival.com/>

The London Handel Festival is an annual celebration of the life and work of composer George Frideric Handel, who made his home in London and wrote most of his major works here. Since its inception in the 1970s, the Festival has established a firm place in London's cultural calendar, with loyal audiences, critical acclaim and international recognition and reach. Our base is St. George's, Hanover Square in the heart of London's Mayfair, where Handel was a parishioner, and we also present concerts across the capital at a range of venues, from the Wigmore Hall to the Royal Opera House.

Each year we reach 5,000 people with our packed calendar of events, ranging from grand opera and oratorio to intimate chamber music recitals, supplemented by a range of insight talks, guided walks, and participation activities, such as our popular 'Come and Sing' event. The 2020 Festival, with the theme "Handel and the Hanoverians" had 40 events planned, exploring the links between the composer and the reigning monarchy at the time to whom Handel dedicated much of his music, and whose patronage he enjoyed. Sadly we had to cancel two-thirds of our events in March/April because of Covid-19.

London Handel Orchestra

The London Handel Orchestra was formed in 1981 to perform at the annual London Handel Festival. The orchestra is made up of some of London's finest period instrument players and is today directed by Laurence Cummings and Adrian Butterfield. It has gained an excellent reputation for historically informed performance and contributed greatly to the revival of interest in Handel's music.

The orchestra appears throughout the Festival at venues including St George's, Hanover Square (Handel's own church), St John's Smith Square and Wigmore Hall, and has now performed the great majority of Handel's operas, oratorios and orchestral works as well as many works by his contemporaries. The orchestra also gives concerts across the country and abroad outside the Festival period.

Last year the orchestra made its début at the Royal Opera House, with 8 sold-out performances of *Berenice* the first time the work had been performed there since Handel conducted it in 1738. The production received 4 and 5-star reviews in the national press.

"I challenge anyone to see this show and fail to come out enchanted by the beauty and inventiveness of the score. The London Handel Orchestra under Cummings' direction plays with quintessential Baroque grace and verve."

[Michael Church, Independent (5-stars), 2019]

Laurence Cummings – our Musical Director

- One of the world's most exciting exponents of historical performance, as both conductor/harpsichordist;
- Has conducted for English National Opera, Glyndebourne Festival Opera, Opera de Lyon, Opernhaus Zurich, English Touring Opera, Linbury Theatre, Covent Garden;
- Artistic Director of Internationale Händel-Festspiele Göttingen;
- Professor of Historical Performance, having headed up the department, at Royal Academy of Music (1997-2012)

"Cummings's pacing of Handel's ear-tickling tunes is impeccable."
[Richard Morrison, The Times, 2019]

