

Thank you for your interest in the 2021 Handel Singing Competition, one of the world's leading competitions for baroque singers. In 2020 we had a record number of applications – 190 applications from 32 countries! 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 2021, 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 recent, good quality sound or video recording of them performing a short aria by Handel. Candidates would ideally include the recitative (secco or accompagnato) for that aria, although this is not compulsory.

The aria should be at least 3 minutes long (including any da capo), and should not exceed 10 minutes.

Due to related COVID-19 restrictions, we are aware that sending a recording ideally at baroque pitch with harpsichord or baroque ensemble/orchestra might be more difficult this year. Therefore a recording with 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

A maximum of 90 singers selected to be heard live or digitally by the panel. For this round, candidates must perform two arias by Handel (either sacred or secular), one of which has to be sung with its preceding recit. (secco or accompagnato). They must also be in two different languages.

The arias must be performed in the original key and original language (Italian, German, English) of a maximum duration of 10 minutes.

Video recordings can be used at this stage, but singers must record with either harpsichord or with baroque orchestra or ensemble.

Semi Final | St George's, Hanover Square, 6pm

A maximum of 12 singers are invited to perform with a harpsichordist, two contrasting Handel arias up to 15 minutes, and in two different languages.

Final | St George's, Hanover Square, 7pm

A maximum of 6 singers invited to return and 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), and singers must perform in at least two different languages.

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

APPLICATION DEADLINE	Monday 4 January 2021
FIRST ROUND	Thursday 11 - Saturday 13 February 2021
SEMI FINAL	Thursday 4 March 2021
FINAL	Tuesday 23 January 2021

ADJUDICATORS

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 2022 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 the 2019 competition was also 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. The referees may be anyone whom you've worked with in a professional context, i.e. opera director, conductor or preferably a singing teacher or vocal coach.

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 do not have to attend the First Round in person and 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 by mid January 2021, 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.

At any stage your programme can include either secular or sacred arias (Opera or Oratorio) or both - we only invite you to submit a contrasting programme at all times. Please note that in each round you must present arias in two different languages, and in the original language (Italian, German, English) as was written by the composer. With the exception of the material sent for the Pre-Selection, you cannot repeat the same aria twice.

For the First Round, you are required to sing two arias by Handel, one with its preceding recit, up to a maximum of 10 minutes. They can be either both Opera or Oratorio, or one Opera and the other Oratorio. Accompaniment is harpsichord at A-415, and the London Handel Festival will allocate an accompanist. Video recordings can be used at this stage, but singers must record with either harpsichord or with baroque orchestra or ensemble.

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 and the other ideally in Italian. 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. 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 mid January 2021 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.

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. In each round you must sing in at least two different languages.

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?

You may have a 10 minute slot to warm up your voice, right before running through the arias with your accompanist (see Q9).

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. Please note that we will not be able to cover any costs related to rehearsals in advance of the competition.
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. 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). Please make sure that both videos follow the regulations in the First Round, in which the arias must be sung at baroque pitch (a-415).
13. What is the age limit for this competition?
You must be between 23 – 34 on 1 February 2021, 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 early January 2021 for the general public.
15. When will you let us know the results of the pre-selection?
You will be contacted by mid January 2021.
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 anyone whom you've worked with in a professional context, i.e. opera director, conductor or preferably a current 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 around mid January 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?
With exception of the material sent for the Pre-Selection, you cannot repeat the same aria twice. That means you may repeat your Pre-Selection aria in one of the rounds, but no more music may be repeated at any point throughout the competition.
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).