

George Frederic Handel

The Musician who produced “Messiah”



Lutheran Musicians

Incredibly, two of the greatest musicians in all of history were born in the same year, in the same country – Germany, and both were Lutherans. George Frederic Handel and Johann Sebastian Bach were both born in 1685. However, they never met. And while Bach came from a musical family, Handel was the first musician in his family.

From Law to Music

George Frederic Handel’s father was a surgeon-barber, who discouraged his son’s musical career at every turn. He intended his son to become a lawyer. George studied law until 1703. However, he was permitted to take music lessons from age 9. By age 12, Handel was substituting for his organ teacher and had written his first composition. Also, at 12 years old, he became Assistant Organist at the Cathedral in Halle.

Against the Fashions of the Time

After studying music and composing two operas in Hamburg, Germany and Italy, Handel moved to England in 1713, where he stayed for the rest of his life, becoming a composer for the Royal Chapel. However, his great interest in the



opera was apparently ill-timed, as the form was falling out of fashion in England at that time. Into the 1740's Handel continued to compose operas, losing more and more money. When his friends expressed concern that the concert halls were nearly empty, Handel responded that an empty venue meant great acoustics!

George Handel was convinced that his call was to set the Scriptures to music.

From Bankruptcy and Boycotts to Success

In 1737 Handel's opera company went bankrupt and he suffered a stroke. His first oratorio, *Esther*, was condemned by some church leaders for allowing the Word of God to be spoken in a theatre! The Bishop of London prohibited the oratorio from being performed. However, when Handel proceed with *Esther* anyway, the Royal Family attended and it met with success. In 1739, advertisements for Handel's *Israel in Egypt* were torn down by church leaders, who also disrupted his performance.



Despite great opposition and serious debt, Handel produced one of the greatest musical masterpieces of all time.



Cathedral, and commented afterwards: *"I doubt if that congregation was ever so serious at a sermon as they were during this performance."*

Seeing Heaven Before Him

By the time of his death, Handel had conducted 30 performances of *Messiah*. He died on the day before Easter Sunday 1759, hoping to *"meet his good God, his sweet Lord and Saviour, on the day of His Resurrection."*

A friend remarked that George had *"died as he lived – a good Christian, with a true sense of his duty to God and to man, and in perfect charity with all the world."*

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"Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!"
Psalm 150:6

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