

# CLEVELAND BALLET

## ABOUT HANDEL'S *MESSIAH*



### **PART I**

George Frideric Handel and the great English architect Christopher Wren were not quite contemporaries, but their lives did intersect. After the great fire of London in 1666, Wren became the chief architect in London creating some of the most important buildings in the city including St. Paul's Cathedral and some 50 other churches in and around London. The congregation gathers in the church for worship, and we experience their inner response to Handel's great oratorio and the elation they feel as the story of the coming of the Messiah is told. We witness their celebration and their renewed hope and joy of life as well as the despair and angst they feel as they are asked to re-commit themselves to a higher calling while still living in this world.

#### **Overture:**

**The congregation gathers.**

#### **Recitative:**

*Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God; speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem; and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned. (Isaiah XL: 1-2)*

#### **The minister speaks to the congregation.**

*The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. (Isaiah XL: 3)*

#### **Air:**

*Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill made low; the crooked straight, and the rough places plain. (Isaiah XL: 4)*

**An inner voice spreads the good news; passing it on to another and still another.**

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## **Chorus:**

*And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed. And all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. (Isaiah XL: 5)*

**As hope blossoms into faith, others join the dance.**

## **Recitative:**

*Thus saith the Lord of Hosts: – Yet once a little while and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come. (Haggai II: 6-7) The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in; Behold, He shall come, saith the Lord of Hosts. (Malachi III: 1)*

**The minister halts the proceedings with the revelation that the spiritual plane is still distant.**

## **Air:**

*But who may abide of His coming, and who shall stand when He appeareth? For he is like a refiner's fire. (Malachi III: 2)*

**Two of the congregation go through the refiner's fire.**

## **Chorus:**

*And He shall purify the sons of Levi, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness. (Malachi III: 3)*

**They are comforted.**

## **Recitative:**

*Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and shall call his name Emmanuel, God with us. (Isaiah VII: 14) (Matthew 1:23)*

## **Air & Chorus:**

*O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion, get thee up into the high mountain; O thou that tellest good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid, say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God! (Isaiah XL: 9, LX: 1)*

**Four women have a vision of the divine life, which they share.**

## **Recitative:**

*For, behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people; but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee, and the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising. (Isaiah IX: 2)*

**A cloud of darkness comes over the people until light begins to break through like the dawn.**

## **Air:**

*The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: and they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined. (Isaiah IX: 2)*

**An angel appears, soothing the spirit with wisdom and grace.**

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## **Chorus:**

*For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, and the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. (Isaiah IX: 6)*

**The congregation celebrates the gift and purity of a new baby.**

## **Pastoral Symphony:**

**The young married couple celebrate their love and the grace it has brought them.**

## **Recitative:**

*There were shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night. (Luke II: 8) And lo! The angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round them, and they were sore afraid. (Luke II: 9)*

## **Recitative:**

*And the angel said unto them, fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. (Luke II: 10) For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. (Luke II: 11)*

## **Recitative:**

*And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying: (Luke II 13)*

**The tableau continues as a dance begins, celebrating the birth of the Messiah.**

## **Chorus:**

*Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth, good will towards men. (Luke II: 14)*

**A celestial song arises in praise of God's gift.**

## **Air:**

*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy king cometh unto thee. (Zechariah IX: 9) He is the righteous Savior, and He shall speak peace unto the heathen. (Zechariah IX: 10)*

**One rejoices in her new found spirituality, joined by four others.**

## **Recitative:**

*Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing. (Isaiah XXXV: 5,6)*

**The Blessing of the Multitude**

## **Air:**

*He shall feed His flock like a shepard; and He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those that are with young. Come unto Him, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and He shall give you rest. Take His yoke upon you, and learn of Him; for He is meek and lowly of heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. (Isaiah XL: 11) (Matthew XI: 28,29)*

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**Chorus:**

*His yoke is easy and His burthen is light. (Matthew XI: 30)*

**Some of the congregants revel in their new found grace.**

**Chorus:**

*Hallelujah! For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. (Revelation XIX: 6) The kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of the Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall rejoice for ever and ever. (Revelation XI: 15) King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, Halleluhah! (Revelation XIX: 16)*

**The spirit of Truth leads a full celebration of the Kingdom of Heaven come to earth.**

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## PART II

The congregation, having experienced the ecstasy of renewed faith at the foretelling of the birth of the Christ child, now imagines itself taken back to biblical times and experiences Jesus' path through suffering to glory.

### **Chorus:**

*Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world. (John I: 29)*

**The congregation moves back through time.**

### **Air:**

*He was despised, and rejected, rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. (Isaiah LIII: 4,5)*

**Magdalene comforts Jesus as he comes to terms with his earthly mission of teaching mankind in the midst of sin and suffering. He, in turn, forgives her.**

### **Chorus:**

*Surely he hath born our griefs and carried our sorrows. He was bruised for our iniquities, he was wounded for our transgressions, the chastisement of our peace was upon him. (Isaiah LIII: 4,5)*

**Some realize the sacrifice Jesus is making to redeem their lives and they suffer the guilt of their own transgressions.**

### **Chorus:**

*And with his stripes we are healed. (Isaiah LIII: 5)*

**Jesus walks on the water demonstrating his divine nature. When others try to emulate him they lose their faith and fall, but our Saviour rescues them.**

### **Chorus:**

*All we like sheep have gone astray. Everyone to his own way. (Isaiah LIII: 6)*

**Jesus prays in the garden of Gethsemane while the disciples' souls go astray as they sleep.**

### **Recitative:**

*All they that see him, laugh him to scorn; they shoot out their lips, and shake their heads saying: (Psalm XXII: 7)*

**Christ is betrayed by Judas to the Roman soldiers.**

### **Chorus:**

*He trusted in God that he would deliver him, if he delight in him let him deliver him. (Psalm XXII: 8)*

**Jesus endures abuse and derision.**

### **Recitative:**

*Thy rebuke has broken his heart; he is full of heaviness. He looked for some to have pity on him, but there was no man, neither found he any to comfort him. (Psalm LXIX: 21)*

**Jesus is crucified.**

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## **Air:**

*Behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto his sorrow. (Lamentations I:12)*

**The whole of creation laments.**

## **Chorus:**

*Lift up your heads, oh ye gates, and be ye lift up ye everlasting doors and the king of glory shall come in. Who is the King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, he is the King of Glory. (Psalm XXIV: 7-10)*

**The resurrected Christ appears to the congregation**

## **Duet & Chorus:**

*How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! (Isaiah LII: 7-9)*

**Some dance out of sheer joy, literally showing their beautiful feet.**

## **Air:**

*Why do the nations so furiously rage together? Why do the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth rise up, and the rulers take council together against the Lord and his anointed. (Psalm II: 1,2)*

**War after war has plagued mankind since the dawn of time and continues even unto this present day.**

**When will mankind be ready to accept his brother as himself?**

## **Recitative:**

*He that dwelleth in heaven shall laugh them to scorn; the Lord shall have them in derision. (Psalm II: 4)*

**Christ appears and removes with a gesture all weapons and effects of war and conflicts.**

## **Air:**

*Thou shalt break them, with a rod of iron. Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. (Psalm 11: 9)*

**Sometimes in meekness, sometimes in might, the Messiah is ever appearing.**

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## PART III

There are many Biblical references to robes being washed white as a symbol of purity. One of the most important is from Revelation 7:13-14: *“What are these which are arrayed in white robes? These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the lamb.”* In ballet, white also symbolizes purity. The traditional “White Act” in ballets such as Petipa’s *Swan Lake* and in later works by Fokine and Balanchine such as *Les Sylphides* and *Apollo*, white costumes signify the harmony, balance, order, and purity of the choreography’s intention. In this third and final section of the *Messiah* we can still imagine the congregation responding to Handel’s music but now in its purest form. The people have been purified through Christ and their robes have been made white.

### Air:

*I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though the worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God. For now is Christ risen from the dead, and the first fruits of them that sleep.* (Job XIX: 25, 26, 1 Corinthians XV: 20)

**Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James, come to the tomb but the angel guarding it tells them that Jesus has arisen.**

### Chorus:

*Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.* (1 Corinthians XV: 21,22)

**When God’s Kingdom comes on earth, all shall be made alive.**

### Recitative:

*Behold I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.* (1 Corinthians XV: 51, 52)

**As all becomes light, the last candle is blown out. “There is no night there.”**

### Air:

*The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible. And we shall be changed.* (1 Corinthians XV: 52)

**The angels praise the Lord on high.**

### Recitative:

*Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.* (1 Corinthians XV: 54)

**The resurrected Christ appears again.**

### Duet:

*Oh death, oh death where is thy sting? O, grave where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin and the strength of sin is the law.* (1 Corinthians XV: 55, 56)

**The spirit appears in the form of a dove bringing peace and contentment to the world.**

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## **Chorus:**

*But thanks, thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

(1 Corinthians XV: 57)

**The congregants join with the dove in a dance of praise.**

## **Air:**

*If God be for us who can be against us? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth? It is the Christ that died, yea rather, this is risen again, who is at the right hand of God. (Romans VIII: 31, 33, 34)*

**With new found inner peace and serenity, the women dance.**

## **Chorus:**

*Worthy is the lamb that was slain, and has redeemed us to God by his blood, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. Blessing and honour, glory and power be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne and unto the lamb, for ever and ever and ever. Amen...Amen...*

(Revelation V: 12, 13)

**The entire group, led by the Spirit of Christ, rejoices in its newfound knowledge of Grace. The Christ ascends unto heaven. God is with us and all is right with the world.**