

GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL
(1685 – 1759)

"the master of us all... the greatest composer that ever lived. I would uncover my head and kneel before his tomb". (L. van Beethoven)

George Frideric Handel was born, the son of an appointed barber-surgeon to the court of Saxe Weissenfels, in Halle in 1685. In 1693, his father took the young Handel with him to visit the court and it was here where George discovered his love for music after spending much time playing the church organ. George's father was later advised by the Duke to ensure that George would receive the best possible musical training as he displayed such talent. Soon, Handel began to study with the organist of St. Michel's in Halle. He learned how to compose as well as to play violin, oboe, organ and harpsichord. This teacher also exposed Handel to Italian and French music.

However, Handel's father had a different plan for his son; he wanted him to become a lawyer and enrolled him at the University of Halle. After spending only one year studying law, Handel abandoned his law studies, against his father's will, he accepted a position as violinist and harpsichordist in the orchestra of the Hamburg Opera House in 1703. In 1710, Handel became *Kapellmeister* to German Prince George, Elector of Hanover. When Prince George became the King of Great Britain in 1714, he took Handel with him. Handel became a naturalized British citizen in 1727 and was one of England's most celebrated composers. He died on April 14, 1759 and was given a state funeral, and was buried in the Poet's Corner of Westminster Abbey in London, England; the same resting place as Henry Purcell, another great English composer.

Major Handel's compositions include the ***Messiah***, the three ***Water Music Suites***, ***Music for the Royal Fireworks***, 29 oratorios, 42 operas, more than 120 cantatas, numerous arias, chamber music (e.g. concerto grossi, violin sonatas, etc.), 16 organ concerti and many keyboard works.

Water Music Suite #2 in D Major, HMW 349

The **Water Music Suites** (F Major/D Major/G Major) were commissioned by King George I and they were premiered on July 17, 1717 on the River Thames. The performance involved more than 50 musicians and it was performed on a barge near the royal barge where King George I and friends were staying. Even though the work was written for a Baroque orchestra, Handel omitted the harpsichord and the timpani due to logistic reasons.

The music is scored for two of each of following instruments: oboes, trumpets and French horns; a bassoon, strings and continuo. It has five movements beginning with a French overture, followed by a Hornpipe, a Minuet, a Lentement and a Bourrée. Legends have it that King George I loved them so much that he requested the musicians play the entire work three times on that evening.

Concerto Grosso, Op. 6, No. 6 in G Minor, HMW 324

Handel's Concerto Grossi, Op. 6, were written between September 29 and October 20 of 1739. Except for two of them, they were new compositions rather than earlier works that Handel decided to rework on. All of these concerto grossi are scored for strings and continuo.

These concerti demonstrated tremendous influence of the musical style of Archangelo Corelli and the solo parts were all very technically challenging. The number of movements in these concertos varied between 4 and 6, rather than the customary Fast-Slow-Fast structure that Bach favoured.

An interesting fact about these concerto grossi is that they were not written to be performed in regular concerts, but rather served as interludes during his oratorio performances. It was an attempt by the local promoters to attract new audiences due to a decline in attendance in the concert theatres.

Selected Arias from Handel's Operas

(I) As when the dove laments her love (from "Acis & Galatea")

(II) Lascia Ch'io Pianga (from "Rinaldo")

(III) V`a godendo (from "Xerxes")

The three beautiful soprano arias are chosen from three popular Handel operas. They are varied in styles (and moods) and are beautiful compositions that give performers tremendous opportunity to demonstrate their vocal techniques.

Music for the Royal Fireworks, HWM 351

Music for the Royal Fireworks was originally composed for a large wind ensemble and was commissioned by King George II in 1749 and was premiered in London's Green Park on April 27, 1749. The intention of the music was to celebrate the end of the Austrian Succession and the signing of the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1748.

Famous theatre designer, Servandoni, built a specially-constructed building for a performance. Unfortunately, the building caught fire after the collapse of a portrait of King George II in the middle of the performance.

After its first performance, Handel re-orchestrated the entire piece for full orchestra with the exceptions of the first Minuet and Bouree where only the oboes, bassoons and strings are used. Handel's Music for the Royal Fireworks meant so much to the British that it was performed at the Golden Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II on June 1, 2002 at the Buckingham Palace complete with fireworks.