George Frideric Handel

MESSIAH

Jacksonville State University Combined Choirs with Chamber Orchestra

JAX STATE | DAVID L. WALTERS DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC
JACKSONVILLE STATE UNIVERSITY

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at Jacksonville State University

Jacksonville State University Combined Choirs with Chamber Orchestra

Present Selections from

MESSIAH

by George Frideric Handel

Eliezer Yanson Jr., *conductor*

Megan Stapleton, soprano

Judy Shealy, mezzo-soprano

Eric Wilcox, tenor

Timothy Renner, baritone

Friday, November 6, 2026, 7:00 p.m.

The Randy Owen Center for the Performing Arts

230 7th St. NE, Jacksonville, AL 3626

Selections from

MESSIAH

by George Frideric Handel

Sinfonia	Chamber Orchestra
Comfort Ye My People	Tenor
Every Valley Shall Be Exalted	Tenor
And the Glory of the Lord	Chorus
Thus Saith the Lord of Hosts	Baritone
But Who May Abide the Day	Baritone
And He Shall Purify	Chorus
Behold, a Virgin Shall Conceive	Mezzo-Soprano
O Thou That Tellest Good Tidings	Mezzo-Soprano and Chorus
For Unto Us a Child Is Born	Chorus
Pifa: Pastoral Symphony	Chamber Orchestra
There Were Shepherds Abiding in the Field	Soprano
And Lo, the Angel of the Lord	Soprano
And the Angel Said Unto Them	Soprano
And Suddenly There Was With the Angel	Soprano
Glory to God in the Highest	Chorus
Rejoice Greatly, O Daughter of Zion	Soprano
Then Shall the Eyes of the Blind	Mezzo-Soprano
He Shall Feed His Flock	Mezzo-Soprano
Come Unto Him	Soprano
Behold the Lamb of God	Chorus
He Was Despised	Mezzo-Soprano
Surely He Hath Borne Our Griefs	Chorus
Thy Rebuke Hath Broken His Heart	Tenor
Behold, and See if There Be Any Sorrow	Tenor
He Was Cut Off	Tenor
But Thou Didst Not Leave His Soul in Hell	Tenor
I Know That My Redeemer Liveth	Soprano
Since by Man Came Death	Chorus
Behold, I Tell You a Mystery	Baritone
The Trumpet Shall Sound	Baritone
Worthy Is the Lamb	Chorus
Hallelujah!	Chorus

Program Notes

George Frideric Handel's Messiah, A Sacred Oratorio, premiered on April 13, 1742, at the Neale's Music Hall in Dublin. The original orchestration consisted of 2 oboes, bassoon, 2 trumpets, timpani, harpsichord, and organ, strings, 4-part choir, and 4 vocal soloists (soprano, alto/mezzo-soprano, tenor, and bass). Handel himself led the orchestra and singers in this first performance.

In November 1741, Handel was invited to Dublin from London to produce a series of concerts, an intriguing endeavor for the composer and a nice change of scenery. He began composing on August 22, 1741, and completed his draft with polished edits on the full score by September 14, 1741, while still in London. What may seem like record time for this accomplishment, this prodigious pace was not exceptional, and much of the work borrows from his earlier vocal works.

Handel's Messiah uses a libretto by Charles Jennens, crafted in 1741 specifically for this work from the Biblical passages of Isaiah, Haggai, Matthew, Luke, Psalms, Romans, and Revelation, among others, creating a historical narrative about the life of Jesus and his Christian believers' reflections thereof. The libretto is organized around three sections or parts: (1) the prophecy of Christ's coming and his birth, (2) the vicissitudes of his life on earth, and (3) the events surrounding Jesus' Resurrection and the promise of redemption. Part 1, scene 1 anticipates the arrival of the Messiah. In the third movement, "Ev'ry valley shall be exalted," Handel uses a technique called word painting, which he uses throughout much of the piece. Word painting helps to associate physical features (landscape) or words to the music; for example, indicating a low setting or word on a low note and more complicated landscape settings are associated with more complex figures, such as the word 'crooked.' The fourth movement opens with shepherds' pipes and the angel announcing the birth of Jesus, concluding part 1 with the prophecy of the events of Jesus' life. Part 2 can be divided into two more significant scenes, the first reflecting upon the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus and the second the spread of the Gospel. The conclusion of Part 2 is the triumphant "Hallelujah" chorus, a movement known as a stand-alone piece. It pulls from the Book of Revelation and follows a motet style unified by the single word Hallelujah on a simple motif. Handel invokes a contrapuntal technique to create a texture and mood that captures the gloriousness of the movement. The final part, Part 3, contemplates God's triumph over Death, beginning with a solo soprano and unison violin in E major. The other eight movements in the final section follow a quiet chorus ending on a solemn "Amen."

The first rehearsal of the Messiah began on April 9, 1742 and had its premiere that month. The work's first performance was organized and benefited the Charitable Musical Society and local organizations in Dublin, such as Mercer's Hospital in St. Stephen's-street. The first performances were so well attended that women were asked to come without hoop skirts, and gentlemen were asked to join without their Swords to increase that audience accommodation, further increasing the charity for which the Oratorio was composed.

The first reviews of the Messiah praised it as "far surpass[ing] anything of that Nature, which has been performed in this or any other Kingdom" (The Dublin News Letter). The Dublin Journal agreed that it "was the finest Composition of Musick that ever was heard, and the sacred Words as properly adapted for the Occasion" (The Dublin Journal). Messiah was a success, and its reputation began to spread, leading to its well-anticipated performance in London on March 23,

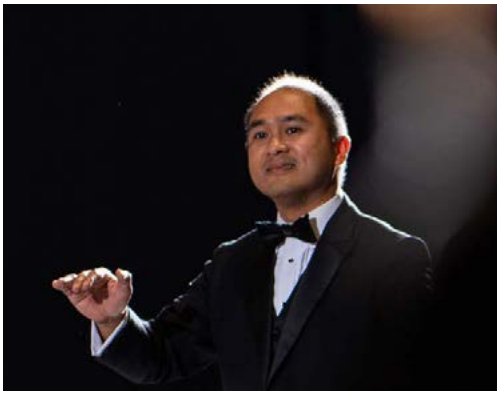
1743. It was continually revived in 1745, 1749, and 1750 before being cemented as a yearly tradition. Handel continually revised the score to match the demands of various instrumentalists, soloists, and available ensembles, along with a need to update his changing conception of the work. The work stays current through its flexibility and innumerable variations. In this evening's performance, you will hear one such variation, focusing on the "Hallelujah" and "Why do the nations so furiously rage together," both of which were revised from earlier versions of his score.

One hundred and forty years after its London premiere, in 1883, at the Crystal Palace in London, the Messiah would have continued performances, including the largest ever performance, when Sir Michael Costa conducted 500 players and 4,000 singers in front of an audience of 87,769 individuals. The tradition of performing Messiah continued into the 21st century. Following that grand performance, The Messiah became one of the first musical pieces recorded on a paraffin cylinder.

The American premiere of the complete Messiah came in 1818 when the newly formed Handel and Hayden Society in Boston gave its first American concert around Christmas, a break with European tradition as the Messiah was meant to be performed at Easter. Another tradition that began in America is the audience standing up for the "Hallelujah" chorus. A custom linked to the closing of Part II as we celebrate the glorious music. This is not required but is more of a display of how this movement has become a cultural icon than the piece itself.

We hope you enjoy this performance of the Messiah, lettings the sounds of the oratorio wash over you to become part of the music yourself.

-Mark J. Sciuchetti Jr.
2022



Eliezer Yanson Jr.
CONDUCTOR

Eliezer Yanson Jr. is professor of music and director of choral activities at Jacksonville State University in Jacksonville, Alabama where he conducts the A Cappella Choir and Civic Chorale and teaches undergraduate and graduate music classes. Prior to his appointment at Jax State, Eliezer served on the music faculty at Bob Jones University in Greenville, South Carolina. He earned a doctor of musical arts degree in choral conducting from the University of South Carolina, a master of music in church music (conducting) and a bachelor of music in piano performance from Bob Jones University. His primary conducting mentors have been Larry Wyatt and Warren Cook. Eliezer has also worked and studied with Hilary Apfelstadt, Don Portnoy, Dian Tchobanov, André Thomas, and Paul Vermel.

An active adjudicator, conference speaker, and clinician, Eliezer has conducted choirs and presented at conferences in the United States, Belgium, Bulgaria, South Korea, Thailand, Türkiye, and his native Philippines. He is a two-time 3rd prize winner (2015 and 2023) of The American Prize in Conducting: College/University Chorus Division and has appeared in Carnegie Hall as conductor four times. Eliezer is a member of the American Choral Directors Association (AL ACDA College & University Chair), International Federation for Choral Music, National Collegiate Choral Organization (National Board Member), and Pi Kappa Lambda. While passionate about conducting and teaching, Eliezer's greatest role is being husband to Martha and father to Isabella and Andre.

Meet the Soloists

Megan Stapleton, soprano, is equally passionate about singing and teaching singers. She holds a Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the University of North Texas, where she served as a teaching fellow in the Department of Voice Studies under the mentorship of Dr. Stephen F. Austin. Dr. Stapleton is an Associate Professor of Voice Studies at Bob Jones University, where she has been teaching since 2021.

An active performer, Dr. Stapleton has appeared with Houston Grand Opera, Charlottesville Opera, Ars Lyrica, the Boston Early Music Festival, Bob Jones Opera Association, and the Greenville Symphony, among others. Her recent performance highlights include Susanna in *Le nozze di Figaro*, Elvira *in Don Giovanni*, Adina *in The Elixir of Love*, Maria *in The Sound of Music*, Belle *in Beauty and the Beast*, and multiple oratorio performances, including her Lincoln Center debut in the New York premiere of Dan Forrest's oratorio, *Creation*. Next summer, she looks forward to soloing in the USA premiere of another Dan Forrest oratorio, *Dona Nobis Pacem*.

In addition to her performance activities, Dr. Stapleton recently served as a guest clinician at Eastern Arizona College and the Majesty Music Rejoice Conference. Megan is currently writing a voice pedagogy book for singers in training, titled *Out of the Dark, Into the Bright: A Guide to Chiaroscuro Singing*.

Judy Shealy is the High School Choir and Theatre Director at Jacksonville High School. She is a 2006 graduate of Jacksonville State University, where she earned a degree in Music with a concentration in Vocal Music. She is currently completing her master's degree in Choral Music Education at Jacksonville State University.

Shealy has extensive experience as both a performer and educator. Her professional performance credits include work as an actor and singer with Texas Legacies in Amarillo, Texas, and Storybook Children's Theatre. For the past 10 years, she has served as a director and music director with CASTKidz and CAST Academy of Performing Arts, where she has worked extensively with young performers in musical theatre and theatrical productions.

Shealy is passionate about choral music, musical theatre, and helping students develop their voices and confidence as performers. She is honored to return to Jacksonville State University as a featured mezzo-soprano soloist in the Handel *Messiah*.

Eric Wilcox, tenor, is a versatile performer and educator whose musical career spans opera, oratorio, art song, and collegiate voice instruction. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in Music with an emphasis in Voice from Jacksonville State University and a Master of Music in Vocal Performance from the University of New Mexico. Eric has appeared with University of New Mexico Opera Theatre, Jacksonville Opera Theatre, Ars Nova School of the Arts, Opera Birmingham, and Opera Southwest.His operatic repertoire includes such roles as Nemorino in *L'elisir d'amore*, Tamino in *Die Zauberflöte*, Ferrando in *Così fan tutte*, Roméo in *Roméo et Juliette*, Eisenstein in *Die Fledermaus*, and Camille de Rosillon in *The Merry Widow*. He has also performed with Opera Birmingham in productions of *La Bohème* and *La Traviata*. As a young artist with Opera Southwest, he covered the roles of the Herald and Player King for the 2014 New World premiere of Franco Faccio's *Amleto*. As a concert soloist, Eric's repertoire includes Handel's *Messiah*,Randall Thompson's *The Nativity According to St. Luke*, *Schubert's Mass in G*, and Mozart's *Vesperae solennes de confessore*. His work as a recitalist reflects a particular interest in art song and the expressive possibilities of the tenor repertoire.

Eric's professional life also extends beyond the concert stage. He holds a Master of Science in Nursing from the University of Alabama at Birmingham and currently serves as a NICU nurse at UAB Hospital in Birmingham, where his commitment to service and care finds another meaningful expression. Above all, Eric is proud of the life he has built with his family. He is married to fellow musician and educator Estefanía Cuevas Wilcox, and together they are the proud parents of three
children. Whether performing, teaching, caring for patients, or spending time with his family, Eric remains deeply grounded in the relationships and communities that have shaped his life and artistry.

An active performing artist, **Timothy Renner** is a graduate of the Academy of Vocal Arts in Philadelphia, PA. His recent operatic engagements include Moralès in Carmen with Palm Beach Opera, Escamillo in Carmen at the New National Theatre Tokyo, Zurga in Les pêcheurs de perles with Opera Tampa, Belcore in L'elisir d'amore at Bob Jones University, and Marcello in La bohème with the Lyric Opera of Kansas City. As a resident artist at AVA, Timothy performed the title roles in Rigoletto and Rubinstein's The Demon, di Luna in Il trovatore, Germont in La traviata, Alberich in Das Rheingold, the Music Master in Ariadne auf Naxos, and Alphonse XI in La favorite, as well as a variety of song literature and sacred works. Concert repertoire includes Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 with the Helena Symphony, Carmina Burana and Fauré's Requiem with the Eastern Symphony Orchestra, Ein Deutches Requiem and Messiah with the New Jersey Master Chorale and Bob Jones University, and St. Matthew Passion with Sinfonia da Camera. This season, he performs as a recitalist with the Emory Chamber Music Society and the Highland-Cashiers Chamber Music Festival.

Timothy is based in Atlanta, GA, where he lives with his wife and four children and serves as the Director of Music at Westminster Presbyterian Church.

Chamber Orchestra:

First Violin: Hilarie Rivas, Hannah Nguyen, Ruthie Nguyen
Second Violin: Annesley Streets, Michelle Lessard*, Ashlyn Endicott‡
Viola: Abigail Nguyen, Rachel Sherrod
Cello: Shahin Kooshiar, Noah Nguyen
Double Bass: Michael Whitner
Oboe: Kelly Newport, Kira Williard‡
Bassoon: Holly Van Order‡
Trumpet: Sam Estep‡, Jesse Fisher‡
Timpani: Kevin Geeter
Keyboard/Rehearsal Accompanist: Allyson West*

* Jax State faculty
‡ Jax State student

Combined Choirs:

A Cappella Choir

Soprano: Emma Aho, Carley Brooks, Meredith Barnes, Elizabeth Embrey, Alyssa Endicott, Ashlyn Endicott, Shealee Griffith, Maleah Hallmark, Rhiley Laminack, Mary Elizabeth Maddox, Seagan Majchrzak, Caroline Rogers

Alto: Brie Dinkins, Mary Ellen Ford, Kari Gardner, Bethany Hallmark, Kimora Linder, Adyson Lowden, Isabella Roper, Ella Watts, Lilianna Williams

Tenor: McCormick Anderson, Levi Benefield, Riley Comans, Jefferson Couch, Mason Holbrook, Grant Kinkead, Will Kelley, Jalon Millhollan, Hayden Medley, Devonte Roszell

Bass: Braden Acheson, Will Ayers, Charlie Breeden, Jonathan Crawford, Jeremiah Davidson, Joshua Edge, Jonathan Lawrence, Alex Frost, Christian Parker, Luke Robertson, Silas Tankersley

Civic Chorale

Soprano: Allison Carroll, Heidi Dempsey, Susie Dempsey, Debbie Eyre, Grace Shelton, Pat Strickland, Cecelia Talley, Amanda Tankersley, Brielle Yingling

Alto: Beth Byars, Gwen Giles, Elaine Heath Greenwalt, Sarah Grace Henry, Kinzley Hood, Teresa Johnson, Bonnie Jones, Kristin Kilgore, Kelly Lenard, Dorothy McKay, Kim Merrell, Linda Olsavsky, Leela Smith, Caryl Lynn Stahl, Jule Anne Stahl

Tenor: Ben Barnwell, David Ford, Dylan Keasler, Brett Kilgore, Dylan Mitchell, Ethan Nessler, Phillip Powell, Landon Shirey, Donald Turner

Bass: David Dempsey, Christopher Douglas, Ethan Duce, Tony Ivey, Louis Kirby, Richard Phelps, Elijah Tankersley, Nathan Wight

Sponsors

Cliff and Beth Byars

Jerred Curvin

Dr. Susie Dempsey

David and Jo Rhea Ford

Larry and Elaine Heath Greenwalt

Tony Ivey

Don and Bonnie Jones

Dorothy McKay

Dr. Chuck and Linda Olsavsky

Phillip Powell

Caryl Stahl

Jule Anne Stahl

David and Cecelia Talley

Paul, Paula, and Leela Smith

Dr. Thomas and Carolyn Smith

Dr. Nicholas and Cynthia Wiggins

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NOTEWORTHY EVENTS

Marching Southerners selected to perform at the Rose Parade in Pasadena, CA (2027)

A Cappella Choir performance at the CantaRode International Choral Festival in the Netherlands (2025) and national finalist for the American Prize in Choral Performance (2023)

Marching Southerners performance at the 80th Anniversary of D-Day in Normandy, France (2024)

Brass Band First Place at the North American Brass Band Association Championships (2023)

A Cappella Choir performance at Carnegie Hall (2023)

Jazz I winner of Downbeat Magazine's Outstanding Performance Award- Undergraduate Jazz Ensemble (2023 & 2015)

Marching Southerners recipient of the Sudler Trophy (2022)

Percussion Ensemble performance at the Percussive Arts Society International Conference (2022)

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