

What do the Nidderdale Messiah and the 1750 London performance of Handel's Messiah have in common?

Answer - They both benefit a charity! This year Nidderdale Messiah are supporting Yorkshire Air Ambulance. In 1750 Handel arranged a benefit concert performance of Messiah in aid of the Foundling Hospital. It was a sell out and such was the demand that the performance was repeated two weeks later. As a governor of The Foundling Hospital, Handel gave regular benefit performances which raised significant sums for the charity, totaling almost £7,000, equivalent to about half a million today!

Although Handel came from Halle in Germany he settled in England in 1712 and took citizenship fifteen years later. At first he indulged the English delight in musical novelty in particular their demand for Italian opera. He had been to Italy and some of his operas were composed for his Italian audiences. No fewer than 31 were written for the London stage. In England he developed the new genre of oratorio, where operatic and ecclesiastical music meet.

Handel lived in Brook Street in central London. His house is now open to the public as the Handel Museum and small concert venue. Its office is next door in the former home of guitarist Jimi Hendrix and so blue plaques celebrating two very different musicians are displayed on adjacent buildings!

Handel quickly established himself in English society. He was Composer of Musick for the Chapel Royal and fulfilled many significant royal commissions. His coronation anthem Zadok the Priest and his Music for the Royal Fireworks and Water Music are probably the best known.

Little is known about Handel's private life. We do know that he showed outstanding business skills. There are a couple of recorded disputes with singers; he threatened to throw one out of a window and apparently fought a duel with another. However he seems to have been generally a sociable and convivial individual.

The libretto for the Messiah was written by Charles Jennens, who wrote "I hope he will lay out his whole Genius and Skill upon it, that the composition may excell all his former Compositions, as the Subject excells every other subject. The Subject is Messiah."

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