

A melange of interesting notes and the promise of things to come

One is still a little timid of calling the Liszt *Faust Symphony* nonsense... It may be the Music of the Future, but it sounds remarkably like the Cacophony of the Present.

– W. F. Apthorp, Musical Review, New York, December 23, 1880.



Conductor - Dr Jennifer Barnes
Soprano - Patricia Woods
Alto - Jacqelyn Brown
Tenor - Paul Morris
Bass- Christopher Richardson

The Great Hall
Newcastle University

Adults \$30 Concession \$25
Students \$15

Tickets at
Lathams Kotara

Music Solutions Warners Bay
Online at

www.newcastleuniversitychoir.com

or

www.stickytickets.com.au/4197

or

phone 4954 8781

Two die in harbour fireworks chaos Bridge gridlocked for 3 hours



Green Park before yesterday's fireworks fiasco

Imagine the turmoil if these were the headlines after Sydney's New Years Eve fireworks! Heads would roll!

But this may well have been the news confronting readers of *The Daily Courant* in London on April 28, 1749, and the man responsible was George Frideric Handel.

Handel's *Water Music* in 1717 was a huge success – King George I was so enamoured of the music that he ordered it to be played three times on the way to and from Whitehall to Chelsea in his famous barge ride. 50 musicians performed the three instrumental suites, and the party at Chelsea lasted until 2 in the morning.

This was one of the first such public performances, unknown before the 18th century. Handel's music created a sensation in London, he was the pop star of the time.

The War of Austrian Succession ended with the signing of the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1749, an obvious excuse for a major party. People gathered for the festivities from all over Britain. A wooden Dorian temple 125 metres long and 40 metres high temple was erected in Green for the fireworks.

To hear a new work from Handel was an opportunity not to be missed. 12,000 tickets were sold for a rehearsal of his *Music for the Royal Fireworks*, a massive traffic jam closed London Bridge for three hours. The performance ended with a 101 gun salute.

The performance did not go strictly according to plan. It rained heavily, and the fireworks turned out to be a bit of a fizzer. However,



the Dorian temple caught fire and burned to the ground, and the panicked crowd stampeded. Luckily, according to a contemporary account, “very little mischief was done, and but two people killed.”

In 1741, Handel had received an invitation from the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland to help raise money for three Dublin charities. Handel’s librettist Charles Jennens provided a collection of verses from the Bible, and Handel’s setting turned out to be the most known and loved of all his oratorios – *Messiah*.

It premiered in Dublin in on 13th April, 1742, with Handel himself conducting from the harpsichord. Handel continually revised his work until it reached its most familiar version in a performance for Thomas Coram’s Foundling Hospital in 1754.

The tradition of standing during the *Hallelujah Chorus* began during a performance on March 23, 1743, attended by King George II. Nobody really knows why he stood, but when the king stands, everyone stands, and the tradition continues. Perhaps the King, who was somewhat deaf, thought they were playing the national anthem. Perhaps he was acknowledging a superior Lord of Lords. Some less charitable souls have suggested that he arrived late, and the crowd rose when he finally made an appearance. Some have even suggested that his gout was troubling him, and he rose to stretch, or even that his discomfort was due to – well – haemorrhoids. We will pass no judgement, but assume that he stood to respect the composer.

Beethoven certainly respected him. “Handel is the greatest composer who ever lived. I would bare my head and kneel at his grave.” In 1789 Mozart orchestrated a German version, adding woodwinds.

Berlioz was less enthusiastic, describing Handel’s music as “a barrel of roast pork and beer”.

The University Choir has performed *Messiah* for more than thirty years, which is a long way from the record. The Royal Melbourne Philharmonic has performed the work every year since its inception in 1853.

Postscript: Some years ago, visiting Dublin, I simply had to visit the place where *Messiah* premiered. I followed a recommended walking tour, and I had a lot to see. The old Music Hall has definitely seen better days, it is in a rather grimy industrial area, having become a factory, now abandoned. I was a little annoyed that a particularly unsavoury character was camped on the steps, showing no signs of moving on so that I could take a photo. I took the photo anyway, and walked on. Some time later, this same character approached me, and demanded that I give him my camera. I rejected his repeated requests and moved on.

I was in Dublin on a two week assignment, and I repeated this story, which I found somewhat amusing, when I arrived in the office next day. My colleagues did not share my amusement, and wanted to call the Garda, as they thought I might have photographed a member of the IRA or some such. I survived, but I can’t place my hands on the photograph. If it turns up in the future, I’ll publish it in this newsletter, despite the threat to my wellbeing.

Ever wanted to sing in a choir?



Learning to sing changes the way the brain works and it is never too late to start. Understanding just how remarkable it is to sing – to simultaneously and unconsciously manage pitch, rhythm, timbre, tone and dynamics – is an amazing human ability according to *New Scientist*, February 2008.

You can do it! Take a step in the right direction now. You’ll be made welcome at the Newcastle University Choir. We rehearse every Monday night in the University Great Hall from 7pm until 9:30. No auditions are necessary.

We usually have four major performances a year. In previous concerts we have tripped down memory lane with the Waratah Brass, swung with the Dungeon Big Band, journeyed from La Scala to the Outback with Tenor Australia and performed the wonderful choral masterpieces of composers including Mozart, Bruckner, Haydn and Rutter.

Get the New Year off to a great start by joining us! Visit www.newcastleuniversitychoir.com for details.