

# The Shepherd Society

presents

the Eleventh Annual

## MESSIAH SING-ALONG

December 11, 1990

8:00 p.m.

St. Paul's United Methodist Church

5501 South Main Street

Houston, Texas

*Shepherd School Symphony Orchestra*

*Thomas Jaber, conductor*

*Shepherd School Student Soloists*

RICE UNIVERSITY

the  
Shepherd  
School  
of Music





## NOTES

Perhaps no other choral work is so loved and so often performed by both amateur and professional musicians than **Messiah**. The work, however, has a "checkered" past. Having failed three times to make his Italian operas a financial success in London, Handel adapted his gift for bel canto and dramatic orchestral writing to the oratorio, of which **Messiah** was his sixteenth effort.

Intended for a charity concert in Dublin, **Messiah** was first performed before a large audience on April 13, 1741. Irish audiences gave the work high praise, but in London, it was not a success. Not until it was revived nine years later did the oratorio receive critical acclaim. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, the work became a permanent fixture in the repertoire of choral societies, Protestant churches, and music schools.

Because of this special position **Messiah** has gained its own mystique. It is widely known that the work was composed in only twenty-four days, but it should be noted that not all the music was newly composed. For example, such pieces as "For unto us a child is born" and "All we like sheep" originally were Italian madrigals, and the fugue subject for "And with his stripes" was well known elsewhere. While such borrowings do not diminish Handel's achievements, they reveal the composer as a practical craftsman who, like his contemporaries, was loth to discard older ideas that suited his purpose.

Contrary to many textbooks **Messiah** is atypical of Handel's total musical opus. In his day, Handel was known for his secular music for the organ or the stage, not for his piety. Even among his other oratorios, **Messiah** is unusual because it contains no plot with dramatic characters and all of its texts are drawn from the Bible.

**Messiah** is divided into three parts that revolve around the life of Christ: the prophecies and birth, the death, and the resurrection. Handel still relies upon the old musical conventions of the opera with its recitatives and arias, but he imbues the old forms with new drama. Most effective are his works for the chorus—the oratorio's real protagonist. Drawing from the traditions of the German cantata, English anthem, and Italian oratorio, Handel allows the chorus to reflect the emotions of Everyman to the Bible's story.

Today we feel the same drama and devotion that a journalist described at the work's first performance:

*The sublime, the grand, and the tender, adapted to the most elevated, majestic and moving works, conspired to transport and charm the ravished heart and ear.*

THE SHEPHERD SOCIETY was inaugurated December 1, 1977 "...for the purposes of supporting The Shepherd School of Music in the achievements of its goals, of providing scholarship support to the talented students of the Shepherd School, of contributing to the insights and pleasures of our members, of honoring worthy practitioners and students of the art of music, its teaching or performance, and of undertaking such other action as we may deem desirable in supporting the cause of music at Rice University and in Houston."

The Shepherd Society's next event is the Young People's Concert on January 19, 1991, at 11:00 a.m. in Hamman Hall. There is no admission charged and the concert is open to Houston children of all ages. Refreshments will follow the program. If you desire further information on the Shepherd Society, please call 527-4047.