

Christmas Pops Concert

December 6 & 7, 2019

Program Notes

Minor Alterations: Christmas Through the Looking Glass by David Lovrien is a medley of favorite Christmas tunes, transposed from major to minor keys then disguised, layered, and morphed even more. From the ominous “Deck the Halls” at the start to the final, frenzied “Nutcracker Suite” finale, each tune is lovingly twisted into something new and inventive.

Messiah by George Frideric Handel (1685-1759) is an English language oratorio composed in 1741 with a scriptural text compiled by Charles Jennens, a wealthy landowner with musical and literary interests. In his libretto, Jennens’s intention was not to dramatize the life and teachings of Jesus, but to acclaim the “Mystery of Godliness,” using a compilation of extracts from the Authorized (King James) Version of the Bible, and from the Psalms included in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer. He was certainly devoted to Handel’s music, having helped to finance the publication of every Handel score since 1725. By 1741, a warm friendship had developed between the two, and Handel was a frequent visitor to the Jennens family estate at Gopsall. There is no evidence that Handel played any active role in the selection or preparation of the text. It seems, rather, that he saw no need to make any significant amendment to Jennens’s work. The music for *Messiah* was completed in 24 days of swift composition. However, the effort of writing so much music in so short a time was not unusual for Handel and his contemporaries, though at the end of his manuscript Handel wrote the letters “SDG”—Soli Deo Gloria, “To God alone the glory.

It was first performed in Dublin on 13 April 1742. After an initially modest public reception, the oratorio gained in popularity, eventually becoming one of the best known and most frequently performed choral works in Western music. The text is an extended reflection on Jesus as the Messiah called Christ. The text begins in Part I with prophecies by Isaiah and others, and moves to the annunciation to the shepherds, the only “scene” taken from the Gospels. In Part II, Handel concentrates on the Passion and ends with the “Hallelujah” chorus. In Part III he covers the resurrection of the dead and Christ’s glorification in Heaven. Handel wrote *Messiah* for modest vocal and instrumental forces, with optional settings for many of the individual numbers. In the years after his death, the work was adapted for performance on a much larger scale, with giant orchestras and choirs.