

# THE MESSIAH REIMAGINED

*We believe in the power of music to heal our times.  
We believe in the vitality of communion, the crucible of shared experience,  
and the healing purity in the universal message of the Resurrection.*

Handel's seminal oratorio, *The Messiah*, comes to theatrical life in a new staged production that evangelises the hopefulness of the 21st century. The new authoritative edition by Malcolm Bruno (Barenreiter) provides a fresh baroque context for this intimate and personal retelling.

This is a staged concert performance designed to tour specifically to both large cathedrals and to small parishes experiencing financial challenges. Singers and orchestra are costumed and staged throughout the playing space in the spirit of a timeless passion for storytelling. The urgency of the performance stems directly from our own age of anxiety: our environmental despair, our deep need for solace, and our faith in humanity.

The stage consists of tables, chairs, candelabrum and an open hearth. A small audience of 400 is seated in the round, with the orchestra completing the circle. There is no conductor. Individual voices emerge from the group of singers, democratising the customary hierarchy of soloists and ensemble. The orchestra are partially memorised to engender mobility about the space, creating a porous environment where instrumentalists, singers, and audience members can share equally in the enjoyment of the music, the libretto, and the timeless pleasure of communion around an open flame.

The story of the Messiah heralds the resurrection of Christ, but the overarching narrative of this production is the growth of a communal sense of purpose from the sheer pleasure of sharing one of the world's greatest morality tales with everyone. This is a pleasure inclusive of all belief systems, rooted in the faith that the spirituality we need today is one of authentic connection with each other.

Over the course of this trimmed two hours-version, bread is broken, soup is served, wine is drunk, hearts are bared. Orchestra becomes audience, audience become singers, and all will be given the chance to marvel at the sheer powers of inclusion - all races, genders and abilities.

The story of the Messiah involves a great deal of suffering. One overarching message of this Messiah is that suffering must not be relegated to privacy and isolation. We can all be saved beginning with the simple acknowledgment that we are not alone. The pure acts of eating together, lighting a fire, appreciating some of the most beautiful music ever conceived, sharing the vulnerability of passionate expression, and meditating on some of the most important messages of Christ are healing in of themselves. No specific dramatic action is taken to appoint a Christ figure. Instead, each singer and instrumental soloist will, through intensive rehearsal and a uniquely expressive approach to performance, share and deepen their own personal connections with this powerful music and contribute uniquely to its revelation.

In doing so, the resonances with the life we live today will be profoundly invoked. This production uses proximity, emotional investment, and audience connection to dissolve the walls we have come to expect in concert culture, in civic life, and even in church. Our message: on the other side of any separation is likeness, resonance, truth, vulnerability, the potential for forgiveness and the likelihood of deep resonant connection. Our modern spirituality can be found in the crucible of shared experience. Music, above all arts, can unite and heal by reminding us of the enduring universalisms in the human condition.

## **FORCES**

**Orchestra - 28**

**Singers - 16**

**Audience - 400**

**Cathedra: Michael McCarthy, Music Director**

**Concert Theatre Works: Bill Barclay, Stage Director**

**Messiah edition by Malcolm Bruno**

The running time is 2 hours. The oratorio will be cut and movements occasionally rearranged to break up the entrained experience of the Messiah, so that even those who know it best can meet this most famous of concert works for the first time.

## **TOUR**

The aspiration for this production is to play to two churches in each city - one of the city's largest, and one of the city's smallest. The audience seating, the stage tables and benches, will tour so as to be recreated in any space with an empty floor. The presence of live flame is central to the design, as is the presence of food and drink.

Two weeks is required to rehearse with the singers; one week with the orchestra. The production will seek some community participation in each city for the Hallelujah Chorus