

George F. Handel, a German-born composer, had difficulty finding what his audience wanted in and from music, his music in particular. When he first began composing, he wrote Italian Operas. Many believe that Handel was a musical genius and rivaled many of his Italian contemporaries. While living in England however, Handel realized that his music did not excite or interest many people there. He needed something different to entice them. It was during period that Handel had a stroke. After his recovery, he wrote some of his greatest music, including *Messiah*, which he is most famous for. Handel was able to arrange biblical text with music in such a way through the use of rhythms, tones and harmonies to produce incredible power, sincerity and profundity. This work is considered a masterpiece in the music world today.

*Messiah* was written in English, but the music itself is in a more Italian style. Handel presents this work as a glorious celebration. This is the story of Christ's life. From before he is born, the proclamation of his birth; his teachings, atonement, death, resurrection and the hope for mankind in the future. With the completion of the "Hallelujah Chorus", it is recorded of Handel saying "I did think I saw all Heaven before me and the great God himself" (Taken from the CD excerpt from *Messiah: The Dream Cast*).

The beginning of the introduction is somber and sincere. This piece is telling the audience not to take this lightly. It has a feeling of mystery and wonder causing one to feel like they want to continue to find out what happens at the end. I do not believe that this sets the tone for the entire piece however, because Handel, I think intended to keep his audience constantly guessing. This piece is very dictated and controlled. It denotes power with a form of sincerity. This is a theme that will be mentioned many times,

because Handel apparently wanted this in each piece within the work. He then switches to a happier tone, with his use of scale runs in a major key and a dotted rhythm also denotes this. He has beautiful harmonies between the strings and winds and also between the strings and brass. Handel uses a beautiful crescendo to hit the climax and then a slow decrescendo to begin the last part of the piece and then end it. It ends with a definite finalized feeling.

In “For Unto Us a Child is Born”, he changes between vocal and instrumental to move the audience. It is a nice mix with the biblical words and music. It was written to bring a feeling of joy, sadness, and a longing for Christ the Lord to the audience. Again, the piece denotes power and has a dictated rhythm. The words are telling us what kind of child this is going to be and how even the government will be subject unto the Christ. Isaiah 9:6 says, “For unto us a child a born, unto us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his shall be called wonderful, counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace”. What a glorious time to be alive to see this happen! The people have waited for this time to occur for generations and now it is really going to happen and it is time to rejoice. That is what this song gives to people today.

Going back to the music again, Handel uses the music here to give the listener an opportunity I believe to think about the meaning. What child is this that there is so much happiness about his birth and life is the question asked? Though happy and energetic, it has a note of mystery to it. This comes from his use of scales where the instruments jump back and forth between notes in a scale and it repeats often between the voices and the different instruments. It is a beautiful piece.

One my favorite pieces from *Messiah* is “All We Like Sheep Have Gone Astray,” namely because of what it means, but also because the music is so beautiful. It talks about how each of us at times is a lost sheep and our Lord will come find us and take us home. The first part is in a sense worldly and then it gets somber as the realization hits that they are lost and need the Lord. From the LDS point of view, I cannot help but think of the atonement and repentance during this piece.

The music uses dotted eighth and quarter notes to give it an energetic feeling. This is the worldly feeling mentioned before. Every thing is happening at the same time and it is confusing and hard to follow, just like the world. Then Handel has the choir and the orchestra taking turns. There is not much overlap. Though it is still energetic, it has a calmer tone to it as it talks about how the sheep have realized that they need the Lord.

The highlight of this entire work is of course the well known “Hallelujah Chorus”. Again we find the dictation as is very typical throughout this work of Handel. If the music and words are followed together it is noticed that the instrumentation follows the meaning of the words and the voices then follow with that. For example, when the choir is singing the (female voices here) ‘King of Kings and Lord of Lord’s and (male voices here) ‘Hallelujah, Hallelujah’. The music becomes quick, almost frantic, and powerful. It causes reflection and deep thought. It is praising the Lord, but it is still a decision to do so and one must do it with feeling and love. This song has a style of round or fugue in it. I do not believe it is precisely this, but some form like it.

The whole piece was written to praise God and His Son; the music and the words. This song has sincerity just from the meaning of the words. The music itself is powerfully written. The strings have a strong part in this with the melody. They follow the voices

throughout. Handel uses the percussion for effect with certain phrasing about the Lord being omnipotent. The winds and brass are not as pronounced here but they have their moment especially during the climax.

The final piece that will be discussed in this paper is “Since by Man Came Death”. The piece is very short but it holds the key to the entire work. It begins somber and almost disheartening. It seems to be accusing man of causing death to come into the world. Then it completely changes tone to say that because of this death, we also have the resurrection and access to the atonement of Christ. The first part is dictated and controlled. It brings a very sorrowful feeling almost like it is mankind’s fault that we are here in mortality. Then it switches to a happier part where it says that without it we could not have the resurrection. This part of the piece is still very controlled, but it brings about deep thought, meaning, and purpose to life. This is repeated in the next segment as well. It is like Handel gives us thought one then the response, then thought two and response two. The whole point of the life of Christ was to bring us unto Him and to show us the way through His life and teachings. He also provided a way for us through His atonement, death and resurrection.

Handel’s music was arranged in such a way through the use of rhythms, tones and harmonies to produce incredible power, sincerity and profundity. He used a wide variety of scriptures to create this work. Though he was not considered a religious composer he obtained amazing perfection with the *Messiah*.