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## Handel for the Holidays: American Appropriation of the Hallelujah Chorus

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THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF MUSIC

HANDEL FOR THE HOLIDAYS: AMERICAN APPROPRIATION OF THE HALLELUJAH  
CHORUS

By

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The members of this committee here approve the thesis of Leah Harrison submitted on 1 June 2010.

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## ABSTRACT

Handel's Hallelujah Chorus has gained recognition in America as representative of the Christmas season, but this seasonal association is contrary to the composer's intentions for the piece. Handel's placement of the Hallelujah Chorus at the end of Part 2 of *Messiah* indicates that he meant it to celebrate Christ's Passion and Resurrection, not his Nativity. This thesis demonstrates how three factors contributed significantly to the American appropriation of the Hallelujah Chorus for Christmas by the late nineteenth century: American audiences' familiarity with the chorus even before the arrival of *Messiah* in its entirety, America's increasing freedom from English performance conventions and treatment of the oratorio, and changes in the nature of Americans' celebrations of the Christmas holiday.

The Hallelujah Chorus was introduced to America in 1770 and spread rapidly through the Eastern United States. By the time the entire oratorio arrived in Boston in 1818, the chorus had already become the most popular ending piece for choral concerts in America's musical capitals. Following just slightly after *Messiah's* debut was a change in the celebration of Christmas. These changes helped to make popular seasonal performances of *Messiah*, quickly transforming it into a Christmas oratorio.

The American context thus allowed the appropriation of the Hallelujah Chorus for Christmas. Through the inclination to define a creative culture that was independent from England's during the nineteenth century, Americans treated the English musical heritage in distinctive ways. Simultaneously, America was experiencing a major shift in cultural values associated with Christmas. These elements aligned to create a context that changed the meaning of an iconic piece of music.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION TO THE APPROPRIATION OF THE HALLELUJAH CHORUS

#### Purpose

Handel's Hallelujah Chorus has gained recognition in America as representative of the Christmas season, despite the fact that this seasonal association is contrary to both the composer's and the librettist's original conception of the piece. The placement of the Hallelujah Chorus at the end of Part 2 of *Messiah* indicates that they meant it to celebrate Christ's Passion and Resurrection, not the Nativity. This thesis will show how three factors contributed significantly to the American appropriation of the Hallelujah Chorus for Christmas by the late nineteenth century:

1. Northeast American audiences' familiarity with the chorus as an independent piece of music, beginning before the arrival of *Messiah* in its entirety,
2. America's increasing independence in the nineteenth century from English culture, including performance conventions and treatment of the oratorio, and
3. changes in the nature of Americans' celebrations of the Christmas holiday.<sup>1</sup>

These three cultural elements allowed the Hallelujah Chorus to become associated in America with an increasingly festive manner of celebration of the Christmas season.

Although the cultural perception of the Hallelujah Chorus in England could form an interesting counterpoint to this topic, including extensive research on modern English music culture would broaden this thesis beyond the range of practicality. English treatment of this music will therefore be considered only until the point at which *Messiah* and the Hallelujah Chorus take on lives of their own in America.<sup>2</sup> The Hallelujah Chorus was first heard in

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<sup>1</sup>This thesis will focus on evidence from what I consider to be the culture-shaping locations in America during the nineteenth century: New York City, Philadelphia, and Boston. Charleston was not unimportant, but its marginalization as a Southern city did not permit its influence to shape the East Coast Arts culture in the same way as the northern cities. Furthermore, this study will exclude the Moravians of Bethlehem, PA (for whom the Hallelujah Chorus held a prominent place) because their cultural influence was mainly restricted to their own community. As Virginia Larkin Redway pointed out in her article "Handel in Colonial and Post-Colonial America (to 1820)," the Moravians had one of the most advanced musical cultures in America during the eighteenth century, but since their colony was largely secluded and "mingled little" with others, its influence in the greater developing American culture was fairly insignificant; Virginia Larkin Redway, "Handel in Colonial and Post-Colonial America (To 1820)," *The Musical Quarterly* 21, no. 2 (April 1935): 201.

<sup>2</sup>Although this thesis does not cover English treatment of the Hallelujah Chorus and *Messiah* past the eighteenth century, simply because it would broaden the topic too much, it should be noted that during an archival research trip to London, I did not find records that suggested Christmas appropriation in England like that in America; indeed, most English performance records indicate that music festivals centered around Handel were the



America in 1770, and its transformation to a piece symbolic of the Christmas season was complete by the beginning of the twentieth century, so this thesis focuses on that period. The objective is to identify and explain how the cultural elements that developed in Northeast America allowed the Hallelujah Chorus to be appropriated for the Christmas season.

Following a brief survey of some of the resources for this research project, the latter part of this chapter identifies the outer framework of this thesis; that is, it briefly shows the culture of the Hallelujah Chorus and *Messiah* at its conception, followed by the juxtaposition of modern American treatment. This framework is provided to highlight the radical differences in perceptions between the two cultures and make clear the necessity of this study. The following chapters then recount the contexts for and developments in the reception of the Hallelujah Chorus in America through the nineteenth century.

### **Survey of Literature**

Publications on the topic of *Messiah* and the Hallelujah Chorus are numerous and exemplify many viewpoints and approaches. Much of the literature on *Messiah* has not specifically examined the Hallelujah Chorus's role in American culture. The resources compiled in this thesis will be useful in producing a relevant study of the shift in perception of this well-known chorus; they can be divided into three main categories: general historical sources, sources on concert life in America, and sources that explore the Christmas holiday in America. These categories represent three relevant topics whose intersections provide great insight for this study.

General historical sources make up the majority of published literature on this topic. Otto E. Deutsch's book, *Handel: A Documentary Biography*, remains to be one of the most authoritative sources regarding the historical facts of Handel's life. The book provides a tight chronology of the composer's letters, performance bills, and bank transactions, as well as references to Handel in eighteenth-century publications including newspapers, poems, diaries, etc. This publication, along with Anthony Hicks's detailed article in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* has provided the basic contextual framework of Handel's life for this thesis.

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most prominent types of *Messiah* performances during the nineteenth century, a phenomenon not paralleled in America.

Most of the literature regarding Handel's *Messiah* is written from a purely music historical perspective and lacks much cultural analysis, other than to say that the oratorio was popular. Winton Dean's *Handel's Dramatic Oratorios and Masques* comes closer than most in considering cultural treatment of Handel's music by looking at the progression of misrepresentation of his oratorios. Charles Jennens's published libretto, as a primary source, itself provides a concrete viewpoint from one of the creators of *Messiah* of what the work was meant to be. This source functioned as a starting point for analysis concerning the conception and perception of the Hallelujah Chorus. Along the same lines, Ruth Smith's *Handel's Oratorios and Eighteenth-Century Thought* is careful to consider the perception of *Messiah* as it relates to the composer's other oratorios, but more importantly it provides the appropriate temporal backdrop to analyze the work's reception during its early years and through the Enlightenment. These sources that report dates, facts, and other concrete evidence concerning *Messiah's* debut and early years have been integral to constructing the context and role of the oratorio.

Examining concert life in America contributes pertinent information about the culture that received the Hallelujah Chorus with such open arms. In his book, *Concert-Life in America*, O.G. Sonneck concludes that the formative characteristics of America's modern music culture were established between 1720 and 1800.<sup>3</sup> Study of musical institutions (public concerts, an increased number of musicians in cities, and music publishing, to name a few) reveals the musical backdrop in America (specifically in Philadelphia, New York, Boston, and Charleston) when the Hallelujah Chorus arrived in this culture. Other sources that seek to define the beginning of musical Americanism suggest much later beginning dates, from the middle of the nineteenth century to as late as the 1930s. Zuck's *A History of Musical Americanism*, Struble's *The History of American Classical Music*, and Barzun's *Music in American Life* each provide helpful theories related to the creation of a specifically American music culture.

Michael Broyles's book "*Music of the Highest Class*": *Elitism and Populism in Antebellum Boston*, presents an even more specific view of the city that hosted the American debut of *Messiah* in its entirety. Broyles writes about the duality of cultivated and vernacular music in the early nineteenth century, how these ideas were shaped by societal convention, and

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<sup>3</sup>O. G. Sonneck, *Early Concert Life in America* (New York: Da Capo, 1978), 8-9.

how they impacted the development of the musical social structure in the twentieth century.<sup>4</sup> His book has been particularly helpful in identifying the specifically American elements that changed concert life in the early nineteenth century, why those circumstances were so friendly to the Hallelujah Chorus, and how they shaped the modern perception of the piece.

Other pertinent sources of this kind include Perkins and Dwight's *History of the Handel and Haydn Society*, Howard Smither's *A History of the Oratorio*, and A. H. Messiter's *A History of the Choir and Music of Trinity Church, New York: From its Organization to the Year 1897*. These books profile the most important organizations in the history of *Messiah* in America, the former outlining the bylaws and principles of one of the earliest choral societies in the US, the latter providing biographical information on William Tuckey, a central figure in bringing *Messiah* from England to the United States.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the doctrinal belief that it is Christ's resurrection that provides salvation to Christians, and not his birth, Christmas has become much more highly regarded than Easter in the majority of American churches. The influence of secular America and consumerism is certainly a factor in this redistribution of importance, but it is also relevant in the context of this thesis. The sources in this section (James Harwood Barnett's *The American Christmas: A Study in National Culture*; John E. Baur's *Christmas on the American Frontier, 1800-1900*; William Francis Dawson's *Christmas: Its Origins and Associations, Together with its Historical Events and Festive Celebrations*; Stephen Nissenbaum's *The Battle for Christmas*; and Shelia Whiteley's *Christmas, Ideology, and Popular Culture* ) construct a vantage point from which to examine the association between the Christmas season and the Hallelujah Chorus at a time when Christmas was stealing the spotlight from the religiously more important Easter. The cultural analysis in these books is rich and provides a framework to which musical analyses can be added, creating a spectrum of American culture that involves musical and non-musical elements.

The majority of the sources listed above center on Christmas in the twentieth century, but the transition to the modern holiday began in the nineteenth century. Les Standiford's book, *The Man Who Invented Christmas: How Charles Dickens's A Christmas Carol Rescued His Career*

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<sup>4</sup>Michael Broyles, *"Music of the Highest Class": Elitism and Populism in Antebellum Boston* (New Haven: Yale University, 1992), 1-14.

<sup>5</sup>Charles C. Perkins and John S. Dwight, *History of the Handel and Haydn Society, from the Foundation of the Society Through Its seventy-Fifth Season* (New York: Da Capo, 1977); A. H. Messiter, *A History of the Choir and Music of Trinity Church, New York: From its Organization to the Year 1897* (New York: AMS, 1970); Howard E. Smither, *A History of the Oratorio* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

*and Revived our Holiday Spirits* points to the 1843 publication of a Christmas ghost-story as a turning point for how the holiday is now perceived. Standiford explains the theological history of Christmas and shows how the holiday had receded in popularity due to its Puritan treatment and the sterile environment cultivated by the industrial revolution. Standiford's book provides a great deal of information about Christmas in America, whether or not Dickens's publication was the most prominent factor. It provides social theory that applies to the musical life in America, and ultimately the world of the Hallelujah Chorus.

Finally, numerous historical newspaper archives were used to provide concrete examples and representation of the changing treatment of the Hallelujah Chorus. Newspaper databases have been searched for occurrences of "Hallelujah Chorus" and "*Messiah*" to observe trends in treatment, performance dates, venues, audiences, programs, etc. *America's Historical Newspapers* and the *New York Times* databases have been invaluable to this study.

### **The Hallelujah Chorus in England**

Handel is best remembered by the general public as a great oratorio composer, but long before he acquired that reputation, he was admired for his Italian operas. In 1719 he was able to establish the Royal Academy of Music, the objective of which was to produce Italian opera in London. The Academy was directed by elected members, made up mostly of nobility who had taken the Grand Tour and knew a considerable amount about Italian opera. Throughout the following decade Handel experienced waves of great fortune, usually due to various political events, such as the accession of King George II and the opportunity to compose for his coronation. He also experienced turmoil, often brought about by the quarrels between singers in the Academy. In 1728 the Academy began having trouble attracting subscribers because of the changing reputation of opera. John Gay's *Beggar's Opera* troubled some aristocrats because of its crude and satirical nature, as well as gave the aristocrats a clear view of the Academy's troubles. Not everyone stopped attending opera altogether, but too few were willing to subscribe for another season. Early in 1729 the directors met and decided to close the Academy, but they granted Handel a five-year contract with J. J. Heidegger, who had managed the Academy's opera house, for continuing opera productions.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Anthony Hicks. "Handel, George Frideric." In *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy.lib.fsu.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/40060pg7> (accessed 14 February 2010).

Towards the end of this five-year contract, the same group who had withdrawn their support, causing the Academy to close, decided that Handel had too much power as the sole composer of Italian opera in London. An unflattering image of Handel was generated in which the composer represented the corrupt government as well as a composer who, without a governing body of aristocrats to direct his every move, had forgotten his place. The motives of the opposition—headed by Frederick, Prince of Wales—are not clear, but Anthony Hicks suggests that the reasons are not entirely related to Handel and his music. Handel's position had essentially been given to him by the King, but the opposition favored Frederick as the future king. Handel became the victim of this political turmoil in the summer of 1733, when a new opera company was established by Handel's opposition, called the Opera of the Nobility. For its opening season, the new company quickly hired many of the singers who up to this point had worked under Handel.<sup>7</sup>

Not everyone opposed Handel, however. His ill treatment served only to strengthen the support of his patrons and fans. Handel opened a new opera company in October of 1733, which prompted an operatic war between the two camps for the next four years. Handel was a worthy opponent at first, but he did not fare well in the end (though of course, his rivals' opera composing careers also declined soon enough with the rise of the oratorio). In 1738 he began composing *Saul*, a sacred oratorio with libretto by Charles Jennens. Jennens saw great potential for popularity in the oratorio, and his libretto combined biblical text with epic poetry, far surpassing the dramatic expectations of an oratorio. Handel's settings of Jennens's librettos were quite popular in London, though the librettist's enthusiasm for the genre seems to have outweighed that of the composer's.<sup>8</sup>

At Jennens's suggestion, Handel wrote *Messiah* in 1741. Charles Jennens had loyally served Handel as librettist since 1735, though their collaborative work had generally stemmed from Handel's ideas, not Jennens's. In the case of *Messiah*, Jennens supplied him with a text, derived only from scripture, representing the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The oratorio is made up of three parts: the first pertains to the birth of Christ, the second to the

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid; "[Charles Jennens] wrote the librettos of *Saul* and *Belshazzar* and compiled the text of *Messiah*, which was his idea; he prompted James Harris to draft the libretto of *L'allegro ed il penseroso*, which he and Handel completed (Jennens supplying *Il moderato* at Handel's request). He also probably compiled the text of *Israel in Egypt*." Ruth Smith. "Jennens, Charles." In *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy.lib.fsu.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/14259> (accessed 2 July 2010).

Passion and Resurrection, and the third to the future of Christ's followers. The first two parts are made up of equally lengthy sections, so the work might seem to suit to the Advent season as much as the Lenten. Jennens would have objected to this association, however. He was fiercely devoted to the Protestant church and was known for his evangelical endeavors. Jennens had intended Handel to present this music—the first of its kind, in that the text was scriptural—during Holy Week in London. In a letter to his friend, Edward Holdsworth, he wrote,

Handel says he will do nothing next Winter, but I hope I shall perswade [*sic*] him to set another Scripture Collection I have made for him, & perform it for his own Benefit [taking the bulk of the box office] in Passion Week. I hope he will lay out his whole genius & Skill upon it, that the Composition may excell [*sic*] all his former Compositions, as the Subject excells every other Subject. The Subject is Messiah.<sup>9</sup>

Jennens meant *Messiah* to have an evangelical purpose, expressed through prophetic texts from the Old Testament and the New Testament representation of their fulfillment, culminating in a celebration of redemption through Christ. Though Jennens had to wait a year for the London debut, the audience was particularly receptive to this new work, though there is no evidence to show that its warm reception was due to the oratorio's unique scriptural setting.<sup>10</sup>

Handel's speed in completing this oratorio was remarkable; he spent just three weeks (22 August-14 September) crafting the work. Though Jennens wished *Messiah* to debut in London, Handel instead took the work to Dublin, where its premiere was well received. His trip may have been the result of operatic tension, or perhaps even a boycott in London, though evidence to establish his exact reason is lacking. It is certain, however, that Handel's visit to Dublin happened just two or three years after a definite shift in compositional medium in his career.<sup>11</sup> Handel had composed *Esther* in 1718, followed by *Deborah* and *Athalia* in 1733, but continued to compose Italian opera seria during and after these oratorio interludes. Handel's true turn to the genre of oratorio happened between 1738 and 1745, when he composed six oratorios with

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<sup>9</sup>Ruth Smith, "Messiah," <http://www.hendrickson.com/html/product/56126X.trade.html> (accessed 2 April 2009).

<sup>10</sup>Hicks.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

great success (*Saul, Israel in Egypt, Messiah, Samson, Joseph and his Brethren, and Belshazzar*). The composer continued on in this genre, replacing his output of Italian Opera.<sup>12</sup>

In Ireland Handel tested his popularity with two subscription concert series, each consisting of six concerts. These concerts took place between December 1741 and June 1742 at Neale's new music hall on Fishamble Street and experienced great success. *Messiah* was first performed on 13 April 1742 and again on 3 June of the same year. The proceeds for these performances were donated to three charities in Dublin, a move thought to have been a peace offering to those who objected to the work's presentation of scriptural text in a theater. The *Dublin Journal* reviewed the performance, saying,

Words are wanting to describe the exquisite delight it afforded to the admiring crouded [sic] Audience. The Sublime, the Grand, and the Tender, adapted to the most elevated, majestick [sic] and moving words, conspired to transport and charm the ravished Heart and Ear.<sup>13</sup>

The oratorio's performance was the climax of Handel's popularity while he was in Ireland.<sup>14</sup>

Handel's success in Dublin with non-operatic works prompted his return to London in the latter half of 1742, solidifying his status as England's leading composer. He conducted the English debut of *Samson*, another of his oratorios, on 18 February 1743, leading to the first English performance of *Messiah* on 23 March at Covent Garden Theatre. Excluding the 1744-45 concert season, the performance of this duo of oratorios became a spring tradition throughout the rest of the composer's life.<sup>15</sup>

*Messiah* experienced great success everywhere it was heard. Its success propelled Handel to continue composition in this genre, but none of the following oratorios fit the mold of *Messiah*. It remained a unique work even amongst its own budding genre. Donald Burrows lists the text, the narrative format, and the subject matter as the three defining characteristics of *Messiah*. The text is without meter or rhyme, because it is adapted from scripture, contrary to the convention of other opera and oratorio librettos. The scripture is of course not without poetic and rhetorical quality, though, for some English translations of the Bible were originally

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<sup>12</sup>Howard E. Smither. "Oratorio." In *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy.lib.fsu.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/20397> (accessed 2 July 2010).

<sup>13</sup>Smith.

<sup>14</sup>Hicks.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

intended to be performed as part of public worship. The second distinctive quality held by *Messiah* is its narrative format. Other contemporary oratorios (even Handel's) were usually written with dramatic roles.<sup>16</sup> At the very least, a soloist would take on the role of narrator, much like the evangelist's role in Bach's Passions. *Messiah* does not contain either of these dramatic qualities. The story is told by soloists and choruses who represent believers rather than specific characters in the life of Christ. This is made possible by the libretto's use of scripture with a narrative rather than dramatic quality.<sup>17</sup> Had Jennens chosen to place a scriptural passage in that position in the libretto discussing the specific events of Christ's Resurrection and Ascension, it could never have been divorced from an association with Easter.

The special character of *Messiah* served to set it apart in its performance history from Handel's other oratorios, which were heard more often and in a variety of programs, while *Messiah* was not used as much in excerpt concerts (at least not until the last decade or two of the eighteenth century). An explanation of the subscription concert tradition is helpful in understanding typical programs in the latter eighteenth century. Various musical organizations issued tickets, usually for six concerts at a time for a season containing twelve concerts. These concerts would have two parts, and one of those parts often consisted of one part of an oratorio. The other part would include a mixture of composers and genres, certainly favoring choral music but also including concerti for various instruments or even a movement of a string quartet. The vocal pieces were often excerpts from various oratorios, often with unrelated themes (for instance, part 2 of a concert might contain a chorus from *Israel in Egypt* and an air from *Judas Maccabaeus*). At least one half of a concert was thus somewhat miscellaneous in its selection of music, and many concerts were made up entirely of miscellaneous selections.<sup>18</sup>

*Messiah* did not fit into this concert structure in the first four decades of its performance life. A look at the programs of England's musical societies shows a hesitancy to break *Messiah* apart. In many subscription series of twelve concerts, all programs would fit the profile outlined above except for the one that fell close to Easter, which would present *Messiah* in its entirety. In some cases, the break between parts 2 and 3 was not indicated, so that the three-part oratorio fit

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<sup>16</sup>Burrows acknowledges *Israel in Egypt* (1738-9) as a predecessor in narrative presentation and points to Handel's odes (*Alexander's Feast* and *L'Allegro*) as the root of this narrative quality. Donald Burrows, *Handel: Messiah* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 55-56.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup>The British Library Archives: Bound programmes from the Birmingham Music Festival; Concerts of Ancient Music; Glasgow Choral Union; Liverpool Philharmonic Society; Royal Choral Society; Royal Society for Musicians; Sacred Harmonic Society (London: British Library, 2009).



into the two-act concert structure. In later years this tradition continued, but the special program containing *Messiah* occurred during the week before Christmas rather than Easter.<sup>19</sup>

The extensive biographical program notes for the 1855 Birmingham Triennial Music Festival demonstrate the opinions held about *Messiah* as compared with other works. Though these notes are from the mid-nineteenth century, they epitomize sentiments expressed from the 1760s and after, as well as compare Handel to later composers:

Handel was strongly imbued with the feeling of religion, and writing as he did all his sacred works under its influence, he made them not only exercises of his skill, not only manifestations of his creative power, but a medium for the expression of his innermost aspirations, his faith and his hope in a glory beyond the yearnings of ambition, present applause, or the more genuine token of artistic success—evergrowing admiration. Thus his Oratorios are purely spiritual productions, rising always in character in proportion to the feeling they embody—in proportion to the superiority of their subjects above the temporal interest of historical incidents—in proportion as these rise from the dramatic representation of the deeds, and the sufferings of heroes, martyrs, and tyrants, to the lyrical rendering of his own personal belief, and the emotions it prompted. This is especially the case with his most generally known and universally esteemed work, “*Messiah*,” which, produced after his two other great masterpieces, “*Acis and Galatea*,” and “*Israel in Egypt*,” combines in a great degree the characteristics of both. The exquisite Pastoral reveals the capacity for love and sympathy, the idea of grandeur, and the sense of beauty with which his nature was fraught—an embodiment of his earthly passions. The magnificent rendering of the Exodus evinces the feeling of the Almighty greatness, and the ability to sing its worthy praises in expression of his heavenly aspirations. The masterly Epic, which epitomizes the entire Christian system, displays the humanity of the author, and the divine spirit with which he was infused, a substantiation of his whole being united in inseparable involvement the two principles, elsewhere antagonistic, of earthliness and godliness, the qualities of love and reverence, the susceptibility to others’ woes; that is the true charity on which are rested our best hopes of redemption.

...The immortal masterpiece which is the particular subject of these remarks may be truly said to have been an inspiration, for it was composed in the three weeks between Saturday, the 22d of August, and Saturday, the 12<sup>th</sup> of September, 1741, an interval of time so marvelously brief as to prove a rapidity of production which has not been equaled in the case of any other achievement upon record of the human mind—a rapidity which forces upon us the supposition that the composer must have been preternaturally excited by his enthusiasm in the subject; and we may ascribe to such excitement the pre-eminent excellence of the work, no less than the lightning speed of its creation. “*Deo Gloria!*” writes Handel, at the close of his labour; and in his dedication of his work he indeed nobly illustrates the glory he extols, by proving the power to comprehend the greatness of the Deity, which is the most glorious manifestation of Omnipotence. It is true that four of the choruses are founded upon so many Italian duets which he wrote in the July previous to his entering upon the composition of this Oratorio: it is also true that he made many

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

sketches for the final chorus, which are preserved in the Fitzwilliam Library at Cambridge; it is further true that he subsequently modified, in some instances several times entirely re-wrote, eight of the solo pieces; in almost all cases retaining the original ideas but refining upon their expression, and generally condensing their development. All this, however, shews what pains he spent in the perfecting of his work, and that he scrupled not to enrich it with appropriate ideas that had been conceived in connection with other themes, while it detracts nothing from our cause for wonder at the perfectly unique rapidity of the original production, since the appropriated pieces depend for their interest less upon the ideas than upon the development of them, and the modified pieces less upon the development than upon the ideas. There is further to observe, that the singularity of this act of rapid production is not lessened by the fact that Mozart *wrote* an Overture in a night; since this he had already composed, and so the writing was only the process of transcription, which there is sufficient evidence to prove was not the case with Handel, nor by that of Rossini, having written an Opera in a fortnight or less; since, however great its merits, its excessive lightness of character might well admit of its spontaneous production, while the sublime sentiment embodied in the “Messiah,” and the profound elaboration displayed in its development, could not result from impulsive conception alone, but must have exacted much deliberate reflection.

...Of the great immortal chorus—“Hallelujah,” which extols the fulfillment of the promises of the Deity, there is nothing to be said that could describe its unique effect, or render adequate praise to the transcendent genius it displays in brightness that is not to be equaled. The living commentary upon this truly sublime inspiration is the universal custom of standing during its performance, in proof that it exalts the feelings and the thoughts of an auditory beyond the situation and its surroundings, and makes them one with the composer in his act of praise. Such homage to an artist as is shewn in this general and irresistible impulse, such evidence of the spirit of a grand conception passing beyond the intelligence to the hearts of those who witness it, and such an acknowledgement of it, exists not in the whole history of art; and Handel is thus exalted above every one who has illuminated the world with his genius, who has stimulated the grandest enthusiasm of others by the expression of his own.

G.A. MacFarren<sup>20</sup>

The culture of Western art music has never relinquished this opinion of *Messiah* as the best and most perfect sacred oratorio. Constraints on time and musical forces inevitably pushed the oratorio into other performance situations. In the early 1780s programs began to excerpt individual pieces from *Messiah*, gradually bringing its representation in subscription concerts up to par with other Handel oratorios. At first the only excerpts were choruses added to the end of concert acts. The Hallelujah Chorus was among the most frequently programmed in this way, though “For Unto Us a Child is Born” and “Worthy is the Lamb” were often used. There are a few instances of the Hallelujah Chorus ending the first act of a concert, but only during the last twenty years of the eighteenth century, and even those occurrences were outnumbered by the

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<sup>20</sup>The British Library Archives.

placement of the chorus at the end of act 2. The Hallelujah Chorus thus began its tradition of serving as a final piece in the setting of a subscription concert.

Aside from its great popularity as an individual chorus, the Hallelujah Chorus was well suited to subscription concerts that had no specific theme. Its text is ambiguous—it seems that Charles Jennens’s intent to create a narrative rather than a drama is the very thing that allowed the appropriation of the Hallelujah Chorus into a context that he certainly would not have envisioned.

### **The Hallelujah Chorus in Modern America**

Identifying the Hallelujah Chorus’s modern American treatment will complete the outer frame of this thesis and better allow an understanding of the extreme differences between conventions in the respective countries and eras. A simple observation of data regarding the chorus’s treatment in commercial CD sales on amazon.com illustrates the modern treatment rather well; we can see that the Hallelujah Chorus is most commonly found on Christmas-themed CDs.<sup>21</sup> The chart below demonstrates popular perception: the data shown was collected from the first fifty items listed when “Hallelujah Chorus” was searched on amazon.com and narrowed to “music.” The other categories represented are Classics, religious, Handel, Baroque, choruses, and *Messiah*. Christmas recordings make up 28% of the top fifty hits; choruses, 20%; *Messiah*, 18%; Classics, 16 %; Handel, 10%, Baroque and Religious both make up 4% each (See Figure 1.1).<sup>22</sup>

Though the figures alone are the most pertinent information, a look at how some of the recordings organize the music or where they place the Hallelujah Chorus is also instructive. The majority of the Christmas recordings place the Hallelujah Chorus as the last track. Furthermore, most recordings include a mixture of sacred and secular pieces. It is not uncommon to find the Hallelujah Chorus following “Walkin’ in a Winter Wonderland,” for instance. In a recording entitled *Handel for the Holidays*, a number of movements from the Water Music are included, then movements from Music for the Royal Fireworks, then a few oboe concertos and concerto

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<sup>21</sup>This data was collected from a search for music on amazon.com for “Hallelujah Chorus.” The first 50 search results rendered CDs that include Handel’s chorus, and I divided them into categories based on the musical content of the rest of the CD.

<sup>22</sup>Amazon, “hallelujah chorus,” [http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb\\_ss\\_gw?url=search-alias%3Dpopular&field-keywords=hallelujah+chorus](http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_ss_gw?url=search-alias%3Dpopular&field-keywords=hallelujah+chorus) (accessed 15 April 2009).

grossi.<sup>23</sup> It is worth noting that none of the recordings shown here has an Easter theme. The Hallelujah Chorus now perceptually belongs to seven categories before it belongs to Easter.

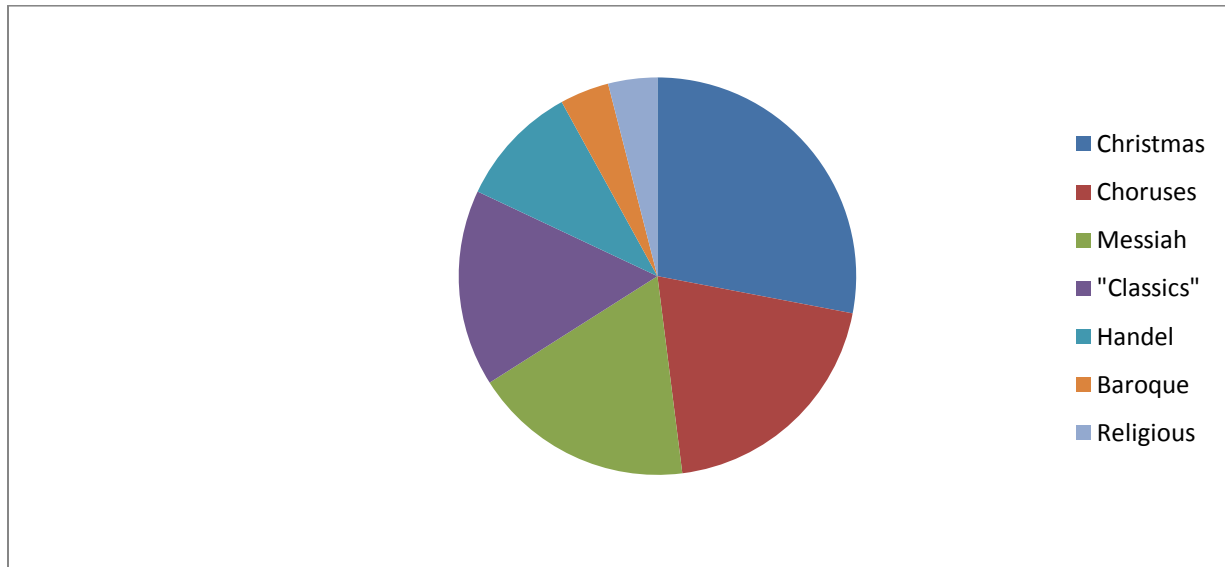


Figure 1.1: Hallelujah Chorus Recordings on Amazon.com. The categories shown here represent the musical content of CDs that include the Hallelujah Chorus.

The juxtaposition above has shown the radical differences between eighteenth-century and twenty-first-century treatment of this famous chorus. The Hallelujah Chorus shares the quality of versatility with Christmas carols: it is sacred, secular, and a symbol of the Christmas season. It is remarkable enough that this is the case with a piece written for Easter, but the fact that the Hallelujah Chorus shares performance venues with pieces that are popular music is even more note-worthy. The Hallelujah Chorus was conceived in a high art tradition but is now sung alongside “Walkin’ in a Winter Wonderland.” The following chapters demonstrate how these changes in convention over time depended on American audiences’ familiarity with the chorus even before the arrival of *Messiah* in its entirety, America’s increasing freedom from English performance conventions and treatment of the oratorio, and changes in the nature of Americans’ celebrations of the Christmas holiday.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE HALLELUJAH CHORUS COMES TO AMERICA

#### The First American Performance of the Hallelujah Chorus

*Messiah's* first performance outside of Ireland and England was in New York City, though the oratorio did not at first appear in its entirety. This performance, which took place in 1770, featured only seventeen excerpts. The concert was directed by William Tuckey (1708-1781), an English church musician who had immigrated to New York in 1753.<sup>24</sup> Almost all colonial Americans were still British both by citizenship and culture, and Tuckey had grown up in England and had his direct personal roots there. Like the other musicians in America in his time, he sought to sustain British musical traditions in the Colonies, an effort that is clear through his choice of concert style and programmed pieces. This chapter examines the traditions of singing schools, church choirs, and choral societies in America, and demonstrates how their establishment and growth created values that would welcome a grand sacred chorus from England and quickly propel it to be one of the most familiar and popular pieces programmed on American concerts beginning in the latter half of the eighteenth century.

#### American Singing Schools and Church Choirs

The establishment of American Singing Schools began a thread of interest in music culture that would eventually allow the Hallelujah Chorus—a piece requiring a higher rate of musical literacy than most Americans in the early eighteenth century possessed—to surpass the level of popularity usually associated with high art music. The chorus's arrival in America occurred precisely in the middle of what Michael Broyles calls a “sacred-music reform.”<sup>25</sup> By the early eighteenth century there was discontentment among the Puritans in New England with the state of church music. The Psalm books used were the same single-melody psalm books that had been brought by the Pilgrims a century earlier. By 1720 musical literacy in America had declined, so in worship the music would be “lined out,” i.e., a leader would sing a psalm to the congregation one line at a time, and they would repeat it.<sup>26</sup> This usually led to somewhat chaotic noise, a possibility frequently aggravated by the leader's own lack of musical training. This was

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<sup>24</sup>Sonneck, 180.

<sup>25</sup>Broyles, 33.

<sup>26</sup>Nicholas Temperley and Richard Crawford, "Psalmody (ii)," In *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/22474> (accessed 4 February 2010).

disastrously coupled with the congregation's tendency to disregard their inadequate leaders and sing in a number of differing tempos and keys.<sup>27</sup> A listener might have a difficult time even identifying the basic tune. Puritan clergy described this tradition as "Odd Noise," "confused," "Uncouth," and "Degeneracy."<sup>28</sup>

In 1721 Cotton Mather, a puritan clergyman who is most remembered for his role in the Salem Witch Trials, wrote, "Should not something be done towards the mending of *Singing* in our Congregation?" and a few months later, "I must of Necessity do something, that the Exercise of *Singing* the sacred *Psalms* in the Flock, may be made more beautiful, and especially have the *Beauties of Holiness* more upon it."<sup>29</sup> Mather's concern for the state of singing was echoed by other Puritan ministers in New England. The clergy expressed their distress over this issue in a number of ways. In an instruction manual Mather made a point of drawing attention to the importance that the Bible attached to singing.. In 1721 he published a treatise titled *The Accomplished Singer. Instructions first, How the Piety of Singing with a True Devotion, may be Obtained and Expressed; the Glorious God after an Uncommon Manner Glorified in it, and His People Edified. And then, How the Melody of Regular Singing, and the Skill of Doing it, according to the Rules of it, May be Easily Arrived unto.*<sup>30</sup> The intent, if not perfectly clear in the title, is expounded in the opening:

It is the Concern of everyone that would enjoy *Tranquillity* in this World, or obtain *Felicity* in the World to come, to follow that Holy Direction of Heaven, *Exercise thy self in PIETY* And there is no *Exercise* of PIETY more unexceptional than that of *making a Joyful Noise* of SINGING in the Praises of our God; That of signifying our *Delight* in Devine *Truths* by SINGING of them; That of *Uttering* the Sentiments of Devotion, with the *Voice*, and such a *Modulation of the Voice*, as will naturally express the *Satisfaction* and *Elevation* of the *Mind*, which a Grave SONG shall be expressive of.<sup>31</sup>

The clergy's desire for its congregation to make a *better* joyful noise unto the Lord required singers to read notated music, leading to the establishment of educational institutions focused on

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<sup>27</sup>Broyles, 37.

<sup>28</sup>Cotton Mather, *The Accomplished Singer. Instructions first, How the Piety of Singing with a True Devotion, may be Obtained and Expressed; the Glorious God after an Uncommon Manner Glorified in it, and His People Edified. And then, How the Melody of Regular Singing, and the Skill of Doing it, according to the Rules of it, May be Easily Arrived unto* (Boston: B. Green for S. Gerrish, 1721), 22.

<sup>29</sup>Cotton Mather, "Diary of Cotton Mather, 1709-1724," *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections, seventh series, no. 8* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1912), 624.

<sup>30</sup>Broyles, 37.

<sup>31</sup>Mather, 1.

vocal training. These “singing schools” were sometimes sponsored by churches, but they remained independent from the established Church itself. They met once or twice a week, and though not initially conceived for only the youth, children and teenagers gravitated towards them. Singing schools spread quickly and became a common solution to “bacchanalian singing” in various American cities.<sup>32</sup>

The extent of the literacy required for merely functional psalmody turned out to be quickly taught, and the singing masters began to incorporate other styles of music into what they taught. William Billings, for instance—one of the best-known early American composers—wrote much of his music for the singing school that he conducted in Boston. His compositions took inspiration from the English fusing-tune and marked the onset of variety in sacred vocal music, though his music did not possess the “polish” and character found in European music. Where some might consider Billings’ music to be a product of sacred music reform, Howard Smither points to it as a reason for the establishment of singing schools. Smither characterizes Billings’ music as having a “rough but vital style.”<sup>33</sup>

The effort to reform sacred music was seen by some—like William Billings—as an opportunity to put forth music composed by people in America. These composers may have had English ideals at heart, but they were unable to totally satisfy ears that had been tuned to British music. In 1786 Isaiah Thomas, a patriot and friend of John Adams, John Hancock, Benjamin Franklin, and George Washington, printed *Laus Deo! The Worcester Collection of Sacred Harmony*.<sup>34</sup> This book is significant in the history of psalmody because the collection was the first to be produced using movable type in the United States. The collection is significant to this thesis because it included three compositions by Handel, one of which was the Hallelujah Chorus (the first American imprint of this music).<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Broyles, 42.

<sup>33</sup>Howard Smither, *A History of the Oratorio: The Oratorio in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* v. 4 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 386.

<sup>34</sup>Isaiah Thomas, *Laus Deo! The Worcester Collection of Sacred Harmony*, Evans 32363 (Worcester: printed, typographically, by Isaiah Thomas, and sold at his bookstore), 1786.

<sup>35</sup>Redway, 203.



Figure 2.1: Beginning of the Hallelujah Chorus in Isaiah Thomas’s 1786 printing of *Laus Deo! The Worcester Collection of Sacred Harmony*.

Though there is a considerable lacuna in scholarship regarding the origins of the church choir in America, Richard Crawford suggests that it grew directly from singing schools. Some clergy, who were severely disgruntled by the changes music experienced in singing schools, simply forbade music entirely. Many ministers endured the music, though, feeling that it was important to obey God’s instruction to make a joyful noise, even if it meant enduring some distasteful counterpoint. Most early choir members were former singing school students who wished to sit together during church and put their education to good use (since by this time they would have grown up and could now enhance church singing with their skill).<sup>36</sup>

With the changes to music and musical forces came new songbooks. The underlying principles of the Puritan reform responsible for this chain of events are still visible in the songbooks, though only secondarily. The new priority of pleasing music was the foremost concern of composers and compilers. One of the first examples of a songbook exhibiting these new elements is James Lyon’s *Urania*, published in 1761 in Philadelphia. This compilation of psalms, anthems, and hymns included modern music from England and bore this inscription at its opening:

To The Clergy of every Denomination in *America*.

<sup>36</sup>Temperley and Crawford.



Reverend Sirs,

Relying on the evident Propriety of your patronizing this Publication, permit me to lay Urania at your Feet.

Should the following Collection of Tunes be so fortunate, as to merit your Approbation; To please the Taste of the public; To assist the private Christian in his daily Devotion; And to improve, in any Degree, an important Part of Divine Service in these Colonies, for which it was designed: I shall think myself happy in being the Editor, notwithstanding the great Expence, Labour, and Anxiety, it has cost me to compleat it.

May You long continue Ornaments of your Prosession: Daily see abundant Fruits of your Labour in the Reformation of Mankind: And incessantly enjoy those sublime Pleasures, which nothing, but a Series of rational and virtuous Actions, can create.

*I am, Reverend Gentlemen, Your most obedient, and humble Servant,*  
James Lyon<sup>37</sup>

*Urania* shows music of a higher sophistication than previous songbooks, exhibiting more difficult and differing parts. It retains some of the psalms settings used in the earlier American songbooks, but includes a much higher volume of imitative music, all of which is British.

### ***Messiah* and Sacred Music Reform**

*Messiah* fits into the history of sacred music reform in a strange way. Trinity Church on New York's Wall Street is often credited with the oratorio's 1770 debut performance, but only excerpts from *Messiah* were heard in 1770, and the performance venue was a tavern called Mr. Burn's room, not a church. The confusion can be attributed to the career of William Tuckey, who conducted the first concert containing music from *Messiah*. He worked as clerk of music at Trinity Church for some time but had been fired before 1770.<sup>38</sup> An explanation of this pivotal character and the history of music at Trinity Church are needed to fully comprehend *Messiah*'s American debut.

Founded in 1697, Trinity Church served as the American headquarters for the Church of England.<sup>39</sup> In 1739 the church established a children's choir, whose members participated in a free-of-charge choir school during the week. Joseph Hildreth conducted the choir, which met in

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<sup>37</sup> James Lyon, *Urania: A Choice Collection of Psalm-Tunes, Anthems, and Hymns*, (New York: Da Capo, 1974), iii-iv.

<sup>38</sup>The Oxford English Dictionary defines the role of a parish clerk as "the lay officer of a parish church, who has charge of the church and precincts, and assists the clergyman in various parts of his duties, e.g. by leading the people in responses, assisting at baptisms, marriages, etc." Oxford English Dictionary, "clerk," [http://dictionary.oed.com.proxy.lib.fsu.edu/cgi/entry/50041358/50041358se7?query\\_type=word&queryword=Parish+Clerk&first=1&max\\_to\\_show=10&sort\\_type=alpha&result\\_place=1&search\\_id=MN4s-0iGfqO-1941&hilite=50041358se7](http://dictionary.oed.com.proxy.lib.fsu.edu/cgi/entry/50041358/50041358se7?query_type=word&queryword=Parish+Clerk&first=1&max_to_show=10&sort_type=alpha&result_place=1&search_id=MN4s-0iGfqO-1941&hilite=50041358se7) (accessed 2 July 2010).

<sup>39</sup>Sonneck, 79.

the belfry of the church until 1748, when construction on a new school building was finished. The new facility was damaged in a small fire in February in 1750 but was quickly repaired. Hildreth was suspected of arson and left the church shortly thereafter. This unfortunate set of events caused the church to seek a new clerk, and William Tuckey was hired in 1753. There are a number of sources detailing the job Tuckey accepted, the first of which is the legal document of his appointment:

Ordered that William Tuckey (who is appointed by the Rector to officiate as Clerk jointly with Mr. Eldridge till further Order) be allowed the annual salary of twenty-five pounds from the first of this month. That he officiate Alternately one Sunday & another at the Chappel, Unless the Rector upon any Occasion shall think fitt to order it otherways; but that the said William Tuckey have Nothing to do with the Perquisites of the Clerk's Office, but that the same shall still wholly belong to Mr. Eldridge, And that Collo Robinson pay Mr. Ludlow Thirteen Pounds Sterling (upon the arrival of s[ai]d Tuckey's wife and children which he has advanced for their passage.)<sup>40</sup>

Additionally, Hildreth had written out his duties as music clerk just shortly before the fire and accusation, so Tuckey's job description is given again here:

I have Fifty Schollars, whom I teach entirely at the Society's Bounty, and daily give attendance at the accustomed time, about 30 of which have been baptized in ye Church of England, & the rest of Dissenting parents, I have likewise about 20 Negroes who come to me in the Evenings to be instructed in singing the Psalm tune &c. . . .<sup>41</sup>

Furthermore, Tuckey's style of advertising himself and the events he conducted gives quite a bit of information about his musical background. Upon his appointment at Trinity, he published an article introducing himself as former "Vicar-Choral of Bristol Cathedral and Clerk of the Parish of St. Mary Port in Bristol." There, he had enjoyed "places of considerable profit and on an establishment for life." His reason for leaving the post in Bristol was that his own "great expectation of encouragement" had not been satisfied, and he assured the New York community that enthusiastic encouragement must occur or he would leave within a year.<sup>42</sup>

New York's encouragement must have been satisfactory, because a year later Tuckey offered "all lovers of Psalmody" a service to "encourage and amend the singing in publick congregations." He also offered to "compose or set to musick any piece on any subject, divine

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<sup>40</sup>Amy Aaron, "William Tuckey, A Choirmaster in Colonial New York," *The Musical Quarterly* 64 (1978), 79-81.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid, 80.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid, 81.

or moral . . . in prose or verse, and adapt the musick according to the sense of the subject. . . .” He supplied a portfolio of works composed in England that potential commissioners could view.<sup>43</sup>

The records of Tuckey’s church involvement deal mainly with the singing school he directed. He is documented often to have directed performances during special charity sermons for the benefit of his scholars, as well as a few concerts to benefit himself and his fellow musician, William Cobham. These activities would seem to have satisfied the duties listed above, but Tuckey’s list of duties changed at some point, though why and when are unclear. He must have taken on the job of clerk in addition to charity school choir director, because he was fired from his post on 16 November 1756 for neglecting to fulfill those duties.

It appearing to this Board that William Tuckey has neglected his duty as Clerk by refusing to officiate in time of Divine Service, it is resolved that he be discharged from his said office, and he attending was called in and acquainted by the Vestry that they had no further service for him. . . .

Tuckey’s removal from his post did not serve as a complete separation from Trinity Church, though. Tuckey was still in charge of the Charity school choir and continued to take individual commissions from the church for special events. For instance, the vestry commissioned Tuckey to write an anthem in memory of George II in 1761.<sup>44</sup>

In 1762 Tuckey proposed a subscription for “All Lovers of Divine Harmony” who wished to incorporate the English tradition of singing the *Te Deum* on holidays and festivals. For the price of the subscription, Tuckey offered instruction in singing the *Te Deum*, promising that its performance would be as good as any in the cathedral churches in England. Tuckey constantly advertised with the incentive of doing things as they were done in England, which generally appealed to his audience, but his profits were not enough to sustain him. In a letter dated 13 January 1765 he asked that the vestry provide payment for composing, teaching, and directing music for two charity sermons.

. . . was I in such circumstances as to afford to do such things for nothing for the Church or School, no person would be more ready as no one loves the Church more, nor has its interests more at heart . . . and whilst I remain in New York shall always be proud to serve the present Reverend and Worthy Ministers and Gentlemen of the Vestry in the meanest station if any station in the Church may be call’d mean. Let Poverty therefore, Reverend Sir, plead for me and screen me

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid, 82.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid, 83.

from offence in petitioning for a Speedy Discharge of my Account for God knows no poor housekeeper in the City stands in more need of your Bounty at this time than poor me, who am Reverend Sir, your very humble and Dutiful servant to commend William Tuckey. . . .

This letter confirms the dire financial state that seems to have resulted despite all Tuckey's entrepreneurial endeavors. Throughout the next five years Tuckey continued to host new events and subscriptions, citing a number of British traditions that would fare well in the Colonies.<sup>45</sup> In 1769, for instance, Tuckey held a benefit concert on which he programmed *God Save the King*. This was the national anthem's first known performance in America.<sup>46</sup>

On 4 January 1770, the *New York Gazette* printed an advertisement for yet another benefit concert:

Concert of Church Music,  
Will be performed at Mr. Burns's  
Room, on Tuesday the 9<sup>th</sup> of January, 1770.  
For the Benefit of Mr. TUCKEY.  
First Part. Some select instrumental Pieces, Chosen by  
The Gentlemen who are performers: Particularly a CON-  
CERTO on the French Horn. By a Gentleman just ar-  
Rived from Dublin.  
Second Part. A SACRED ORATORIO, on the  
Prophecies concerning Christ, and his Coming; being an  
Extract from the late Mr. HANDEL'S GRAND ORATORIO,  
Called the MESSIAH, consisting of the Overture, and sixteen  
Other Pieces, viz. Airs, Recitatives, and Choruses.  
Never performed in America.  
The Words of the ORATORIO will be delivered gratis (to  
The Ladies and Gentlemen) who are pleased to patronize  
And encourage this CONCERT, or may be purchased of Mr.  
Tuckey, by others for six pence.  
As it is impossible that a Performance of this sort can  
Be carried on without the kind Assistance of Gentlemen, who  
Are Lovers of Music and Performers on Instruments; Mr.  
Tuckey will always gratefully acknowledge the Favour of the  
Gentlemen who assist him.  
Tickets to be had of Mr. Tuckey, at eight shillings  
Each. To begin precisely at 6 o'clock.  
New York Gazette, January 4, 1770<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid, 85.

<sup>46</sup>Sonneck, 179.

<sup>47</sup>*New York Gazette* 949 (4 January 1770), 4.

On 8 January it was reported that the concert was postponed for a week: “Mr. Tuckey’s Concert of the Sacred Oratorio, is postpon’d to Tuesday the 16<sup>th</sup> Instant, as there is a considerable Number of Ladies and Gentlemen engag’d for the 9<sup>th</sup>, which Mr. Tuckey flatters himself will honour him with their Company.”<sup>48</sup> Thus, the first American performance of *Messiah* occurred neither in Lent nor during Christmas time.<sup>49</sup>

Of great importance are the details of this performance. Unfortunately, there is no published reaction of any kind—not even a list identifying the seventeen pieces (except the overture). The archives at Trinity Church have a great deal of information on this performance, since it was originally thought to have taken place in this sacred venue, but they, too, are missing a list of the pieces. Though we are only left with speculation, there is good reason to suppose that the Hallelujah Chorus was among the seventeen excerpts and that it may have been programmed last. Oscar G. Sonneck’s *Early Concert-Life in America* gives account after account of subscription concerts that (as was the practice in London) feature assortments of pieces without unifying themes, and the majority of the concerts after 1770 end with the Hallelujah Chorus.<sup>50</sup>

On 20 April 1786 “A Grand Concert of Sacred Music” was advertised in the *Pennsylvania Packet* as a benefit concert for a number of charities. This concert stands out in American Colonial music history, because of its enormous forces: a chorus of 230 and orchestra of 50 were assembled for the concert with the following program:

A GRAND CONCERT OF SACRED MUSIC for the benefit of the Pennsylvania Hospital, Philadelphia Dispensary, and the Poor, for whom there has, hitherto, been no regular provision made—will be performed at the Reformed German Church in Race Street, on Thursday, the 4<sup>th</sup> of May. The doors will be opened at half an hour after nine o’clock in the morning, but not sooner, and the music will begin, precisely at eleven o’clock, after which no person can be admitted.

#### ORDER AND WORDS OF THE MUSIC

- I. Martini’s Overture.
- II. An Anthem from the 150<sup>th</sup> Psalm  
“Let the shrill trumpet’s war like voice Make rocks and hills rebound . . .”

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<sup>48</sup>*New York Gazette* 950 (8 January 1770), 4.

<sup>49</sup>A 9 January performance is only days outside of the Christmas calendar, but with such a wide opportunity to give a Christmas-themed concert (Advent and Christmastide), I do not believe this concert to be intended as a Christmas celebration.

<sup>50</sup>Sonneck, 108-21; concerts include “Mr. Adgate’s Last Concert,” 3 June 1786, which mimicked the program of “A Grand Concert of Sacred Music,” 4 May 1786; The “First Uranian Concert,” 12 April 1787; and “A Grance Concert of Sacred Music,” 14 July 1790.

- III. An Anthem from the 18<sup>th</sup> Psalm by the Rev. James Lyon.  
“The Lord descended from above . . .”
- IV. Flute Concerto by Mr. Brown
- V. The Voice of Time  
‘Hark! Hark! Times hastes away’ . . .
- VI. An Anthem from the 97<sup>th</sup> Psalm, by Mr. Tuckey  
‘Jehovah reigns, let all the earth In his just government rejoice . . .’
- VII. A Violin Concerto by Mr. Juhan
- VIII. An Anthem from the 122d Psalm by A. Williams.  
‘I was glad, when they said unto me . . .’
- IX. An Anthem, from the 2d of Solomon’s Song, by Mr. Billings.  
‘I am the Rose of Sharon, and the lily of the vallies . . .’
- X. Hallelujah Chorus from the Messiah, Handel  
‘Hallelujah—(often repeated)—For the God omnipotent reigneth, Hallelujah, etc . . .’  
. . .To administer some relief to him whose hope is like a shadow, to raise up him who is bowed down with sorrow, and to shew that the fine Arts may and ought to subserve the purposes of humanity are, we believe, the views with which the performers have voluntarily, offered their service on this occasion.<sup>51</sup>

The concert made a huge impression on the editor of the *Pennsylvania Packet*, and he published a lengthy review that foreshadows later musical criticism. Of particular interest are his comments explaining the origin of the idea for the concert. This concert was suggested to the Musical Institution<sup>52</sup> by the *Commemoration of Handel* in London and the *Sacred Concert* in Boston, who had recently put on the same program; unfortunately, no other information on Boston’s *Sacred Concert* is available, aside from saying that the Musical Institution imitated its program. Furthermore, he discussed the final chorus: “The whole concluded with the exertions of the full band in the performance of that most sublime of all musical compositions, the grand chorus in the Messiah, by the celebrated Handel, to these words ‘Hallelujah! For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth’, etc.” This program was essentially duplicated, though with a smaller musical force, on 7 June of the same year.<sup>53</sup>

A similar miscellaneous concert in 1787, also ending with the Hallelujah Chorus, is an early example of annotated programs in America. The information given on the Hallelujah Chorus is extensive, producing something similar to a listening guide that might be found in a music appreciation textbook.

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<sup>51</sup>Sonneck, 108-9.

<sup>52</sup>The Musical Institution does not turn up in documents related to this genre, time, or place. My best guess is that this institution is the one and the same with Andrew Adgate’s Institution for the Encouragement of Church Music, which was founded in 1784.

<sup>53</sup>Sonneck, 108-11.

The HALLELUJAH CHORUS from the Messiah. By Handel.  
(Introduced by three bars of Instrumental Music)

	Remarks
Hallelujah: For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth:	<i>[Here the voices unite]</i>
Hallelujah: (several times) For the Lord God, etc.	<i>[By the Counter, Tenor and Bass]</i>
Hallelujah: (several times) For the Lord God, etc.	<i>[1<sup>st</sup> by the treble; 2<sup>d</sup> by the tenor and bass, and then by the counter and tenor, whilst the other parts, through the whole of this passage, are repeating Hal. In every variety.</i>
The Kingdom of this world, is become The kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ	<i>[Chorus]</i>
And he shall reign for ever, etc. King of king, and Lord of lords:	<i>[A beautiful fugue]</i> <i>[By the Treble and Counter in long notes; whilst the tenor and Bass repeat ‘for ever and ever, Hal.’ In quick notes with intervals]</i>
King of king, and Lord of lords:	<i>[Two or three times in very low notes; by the Treble: whilst the Counter, Tenor and bass are repeating, ‘for ever and ever, Hal.’ Often in quick notes, with intervals: <i>The effect is wonderful.</i></i>
And he shall reign for ever and ever (often) King of King, and Lord of Lords: And he shall reign for ever and ever, Hal.	<i>[Several times: the harmony very full]</i> <i>[often: the last Hal. Very slow]</i>

The presence of the Hallelujah Chorus as the final piece became a convention of subscription concerts in America. Few concerts cited in this section of Sonneck’s history are without it. These concerts had miscellaneous themes and took place on miscellaneous performance dates. The Hallelujah Chorus was not yet associated with Christmas, but it had broken any tie to Easter.<sup>54</sup>

### American Choral Societies

Information about the forces used for the concerts cited above is generally not provided in their respective sources, but a number of different types of choirs began appearing in the American music capitals. Singing schools and church choirs are discussed above, and church choirs either became or inspired choral societies. The distinctions are not often represented in

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid, 115-16.

contemporary materials, perhaps because they generally overlap to a substantial degree. Church choir members were often also choral society members, just as singing school students frequently became church choir members.

The Stoughton Musical Society was the earliest documented choral society in America, established in 1786 in Boston. This society's archival materials do not include much detail concerning what music they performed, aside from saying that they sang from collections made up of mostly American music. When the Stoughton Musical Society sought to publish its own collection of choral works in 1829, the publisher vetoed some of their choices and replaced them with English songs. The single mention of Handel's Hallelujah Chorus comes in a record of a choral competition in 1790 (a more specific date is not available) against the Dorchester First Parish. The two societies took turns singing prepared anthems, until the Stoughton Society sang the Hallelujah Chorus from memory, which won the competition.<sup>55</sup>

Along with the Stoughton Musical Society came similar societies in Franklin, Salem, and West Boston, to name a few.<sup>56</sup> The Second Baptist Singing Society of Boston, for example, performed a concert on 16 February 1815 celebrating the signing of a peace treaty at Ghent. This program included the first part of Haydn's *The Creation*, the Hallelujah Chorus, parts of Judas Maccabeus, the Ode to St. Cecilia's Day, and the Dettingen *Te Deum* (the order of this program is not available).<sup>57</sup> The Handel and Haydn Society of Boston performed a similar program as their inaugural concert in 1815, ending with the Hallelujah Chorus. This choral society is discussed at length in the next chapter, as its significance relates to the development of musical Americanism.

Multiple choral societies were established throughout America's musical capitals at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries, and they were a necessary step if Americans had any hope of expanding the musical possibilities of choral music. Instrumental music had dominated concert music attentions at the beginning of American concert life,

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<sup>55</sup>Samuel Bradley Noyes, "Historical Attenda," in *The Old Stoughton Musical Society: An Historical and Informative Record of the Oldest Choral Society in America Together with Interesting Data of its Organization, Meetings, Reunions and Outings, and a Complete List of Past and Present Officers and Members*, <http://www.stoughtonhistory.com/1929contents.htm> (accessed 4 March 2010).

<sup>56</sup>The Handel and Haydn Society, *History of the Handel and Haydn Society of Boston, Massachusetts*, (New York: Da Capo, 1977), 29.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid*, 35.



reflecting the lack of choral forces.<sup>58</sup> As a desire for more sophisticated vocal music became prevalent, more accomplished groups became a necessity.

Through this evolution in the culture of American vocal music, the Hallelujah Chorus was widely known prior to the 1818 arrival of *Messiah*.<sup>59</sup> The performance dates and programs show that the chorus lacked strong associations with its oratorio or a specific season. American music culture was still largely the same as England's during the late eighteenth century, consisting of choral subscription concerts as choirs developed. The most prominent difference between English and American treatment of the Hallelujah Chorus is this: *Messiah* was set apart from other oratorios in England because its listeners thought it more beautiful than other works of this genre. For this reason, excerpts were not divided from the context of the entire work as quickly as choruses, etc. from other oratorios. The Hallelujah Chorus gained almost fifty years of cultural importance in America before *Messiah* arrived to give a different context to the piece, and indeed before America had much exposure to oratorios in general. Rather than save the Hallelujah Chorus for the special occasion of a *Messiah* performance, Americans performed the chorus as much as possible because it was a piece they liked. This treatment of the Hallelujah Chorus was integral to the path both the piece and *Messiah* as a whole would take in the first half of the nineteenth century.

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<sup>58</sup> Sonneck, 102-81.

<sup>59</sup> It is interesting to note that Beethoven's oratorio, *Christus am Ölberg*, ends with a chorus entitled "Welten singen Dank und Ehre," more popularly referred to as the "Hallelujah Chorus." This chorus was quite popular in America, necessitating an American imprint in 1818; Otto Edwin Albrecht, "America's early acquaintance with Beethoven," in Martin Bente, *Musik, Edition, Interpretation : Gedenkschrift Günter Henle* (Munich: Henle, 1980), 17.

## CHAPTER 3 MUSICAL AMERICANISM AND A CHANGING CHRISTMAS

### *Messiah* comes to America

Forty-eight years after the Hallelujah Chorus and sixteen other *Messiah* excerpts were first performed in America, the entire oratorio was performed by one of America's most important choral societies, the Handel and Haydn Society. This chapter shows how the treatment of *Messiah* and the Hallelujah Chorus was affected by the development of a specifically American music culture. This chapter also explores the concurrent development of changes in the celebration of American Christmas.

### Musical Americanism

There is some debate as to when exactly American music culture began to differentiate itself from that of England. In his book *Early Concert-Life in America* O. G. Sonneck writes that beginning in 1720,

...we notice a steadily growing number of musicians who sought their fortunes in the Colonies, an increasing desire for organs, flutes, guitars, violins, harpsichords, the establishment of "singing schools", an improvement in church music, the signs of a budding music trade from ruled music paper to sonatas and concertos, the advent of music engravers, publishers and manufacturers of instruments, the tentative efforts to give English opera a home in America, the introduction of public concerts, in short the beginnings of what may properly be termed the formative period in our musical history, running from 1720 until about 1800.<sup>60</sup>

America's musical culture certainly experienced change and growth, but none of the things that Sonneck lists are particularly American. It is fair to say that a music culture developed in America between 1720 and 1800, but not an *American* music culture. On the other hand, J. W. Struble's *The History of American Classical Music* explores a much later date, saying that American music culture on the "Atlantic seaboard" was nothing more than an imitation of England until 1875:

The music of the urban centers of the Atlantic seaboard was the closest in style and spirit to contemporaneous European music during the colonial and early national period. Because the urban colonists were largely of English origin, their music was particularly similar to the English style of the day, dominated by Georg Friedrich Händel and ballad opera composers such as Samuel Arnold.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>Ibid, 8-9.

<sup>61</sup>J. W. Struble, *The History of America Classical Music* (New York: Facts on File, 1995), 4.

Neither Sonneck nor Struble accurately describes the separation of American from British musical culture.

The American treatment of the Hallelujah Chorus covered thus far (from its arrival in 1770 through the early nineteenth century) adheres closely to the treatment of most grand choruses in England; in America, the Hallelujah Chorus was often excerpted from its oratorio and programmed on subscription concerts without a theme. It is true that Americans were less reverent than the English with regard to how often they programmed the Hallelujah Chorus, but as briefly discussed earlier, the English reverence for the work's integrity was manifested in their not excerpting individual pieces from their favorite oratorio and only performing it as a whole. Clearly, this was not an option for Americans, who did not have access to the entire oratorio. Other than this difference, the late eighteenth-century treatment of the Hallelujah Chorus was quite similar in England and America.

The beginning of the nineteenth century held the origins of a particularly American music culture. Americans sought to distance themselves from English traditions, laws, and lifestyle. The war of 1812 was initiated by Americans because they felt that the British Navy was restricting their independence by violating fair maritime trade with France. These political struggles were reflected in the creative world as well. English critic Sidney Smith wrote an article in order to draw attention to America's artistic weak spot, asking, "In the four quarters of the globe, who reads an American book? Or goes to an American play? Or looks at an American picture or statue?"<sup>62</sup> Many American writers responded to this jab with now famous publications (authors such as Washington Irving and James Fenimore Cooper, to name a few), but the musical response took a bit longer than the literary. The American composer and critic William Henry Fry (1813-1864) addressed the dearth of particularly American music in 1852, calling for reform:

It is time we had a Declaration of Independence in Art, and laid a foundation of an American school of Painting, Sculpture, and Music. Until this Declaration of Independence in art be made—until American composers shall discard their foreign liveries and found an American School—and until the American public shall learn to support American artists, Art shall not become indigenous to this country.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>Sidney Smith, *Edinburgh Review*, Vol. XXXII, 1820, 69-80, cited in Barbara Zuck, *A History of Musical Americanism* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research, 1980), 17.

<sup>63</sup>William Henry Fry, "Mr. Fry's 'American Ideas' about Music," *Dwight's Journal of Music* II, no. 23 (12 March 1853), 181.

Fry himself responded, of course, as well as other composers such as Anthony Philip Heinrich (1781-1861) and George Frederick Bristow (1825-1898). This began the creation of new American music.

In his history of the oratorio, Howard Smither describes an interesting blend of influences in the American treatment of this genre. The establishment of choral societies in the early nineteenth century was not only to satisfy a desire to improve church music, but also as a means of competition with European traditions. Americans were not writing oratorios, so European music commanded the repertoire, but the treatment of these works was not strictly that of their homelands.<sup>64</sup> If Americans had any desire to separate themselves from the English culture that had shaped the country throughout the end of the eighteenth century, in the realm of the oratorio, the treatment of the genre was the only avenue that allowed variation. By example, one of the Handel and Haydn Society's earliest endeavors was a three-day concert of *Messiah* and *The Creation*, day one including Part I of both *Messiah* and *The Creation*, day two including the respective second parts, and so on. The *Columbian Centinel* describes the reason for the concert, saying "there is a diversity of opinion about their comparative merits," so the odd schedule "will give specimens of both before the other is forgotten." A consensus was never reached regarding the comparative merits of the two oratorios.<sup>65</sup>

As is clear by the presence of *Messiah* and the Hallelujah Chorus in modern America, music that had been popular prior to this strive for independence from English creative culture continued to have significant exposure. The growing independence of American culture is evident in the treatment of English music during the early nineteenth century. Certain elements of the changing music culture outlined by Sonneck helped European music to remain present in America, like the entry of many continental European immigrants and their musical practices. German and French culture began to impact the changing music culture not so much by creating an American identity, but by further severing ties to England's culture. Barbara Zuck writes,

Although an Anglo-American offshoot had taken root, the level and scope of native composition and performance was not sufficiently strong to resist the influx of continental European music. Many well-trained immigrant musicians were eager to

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<sup>64</sup>Smither, 390.

<sup>65</sup>*Columbian Centinel*, 16 April 1817, quoted in Smither, *A History of the Oratorio*, 396.

capitalize on their abilities in fresh territory, forcing native Americans to compete with musicians better trained than themselves.<sup>66</sup>

It was the emigration of continental European musicians in the beginning of the nineteenth century that allowed Americans the opportunity to make the initial break from English music culture.

### ***The Handel and Haydn Society***

The Handel and Haydn Society of Boston was a choral society founded in 1815 and is one of the best representatives of a musical organization that performed English music without strictly observing English performance traditions. In 1818 the Handel and Haydn Society performed *Messiah* in its entirety for the first time in America, but they performed it on Christmas Day, not during Lent as was the English custom for oratorios. Throughout the nineteenth century, the Handel and Haydn Society's performances of *Messiah* increasingly took place during the Christmas season.<sup>67</sup>

The Handel and Haydn Society is the forum in which *Messiah* gained its Christmas performance convention, though the first performance can hardly be seen as the beginning of that. Between 1818 and 1850 the oratorio was performed outside of the Christmas season as many times as it was performed in it. In the following twenty-five years the Christmas performances far outnumbered the non-Christmas performances, and the final quarter of the nineteenth century included only three non-Christmas performances (See Figure 3.1).

By the end of the nineteenth century, the Handel and Haydn Society's performances of *Messiah* had greatly increased and took place almost exclusively during the Christmas season. In 1854 the society began an annual Christmas performance of *Messiah* tradition that has continued to present day. Though other nineteenth-century choral societies are not as well documented, it is reasonable to say that Christmas performances of *Messiah* increased everywhere, because other groups looked to the Handel and Haydn Society as an example and followed suit.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>Barbara Zuck, *A History of Musical Americanism* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research , 1980), 18.

<sup>67</sup>The Handel and Haydn Society Online, *On-Line Archive Search Page*, <http://webgraphics.web108.discountasp.net/HandH/Search.aspx> (accessed 23 January 2010).

<sup>68</sup>The Handel and Haydn Society Online.

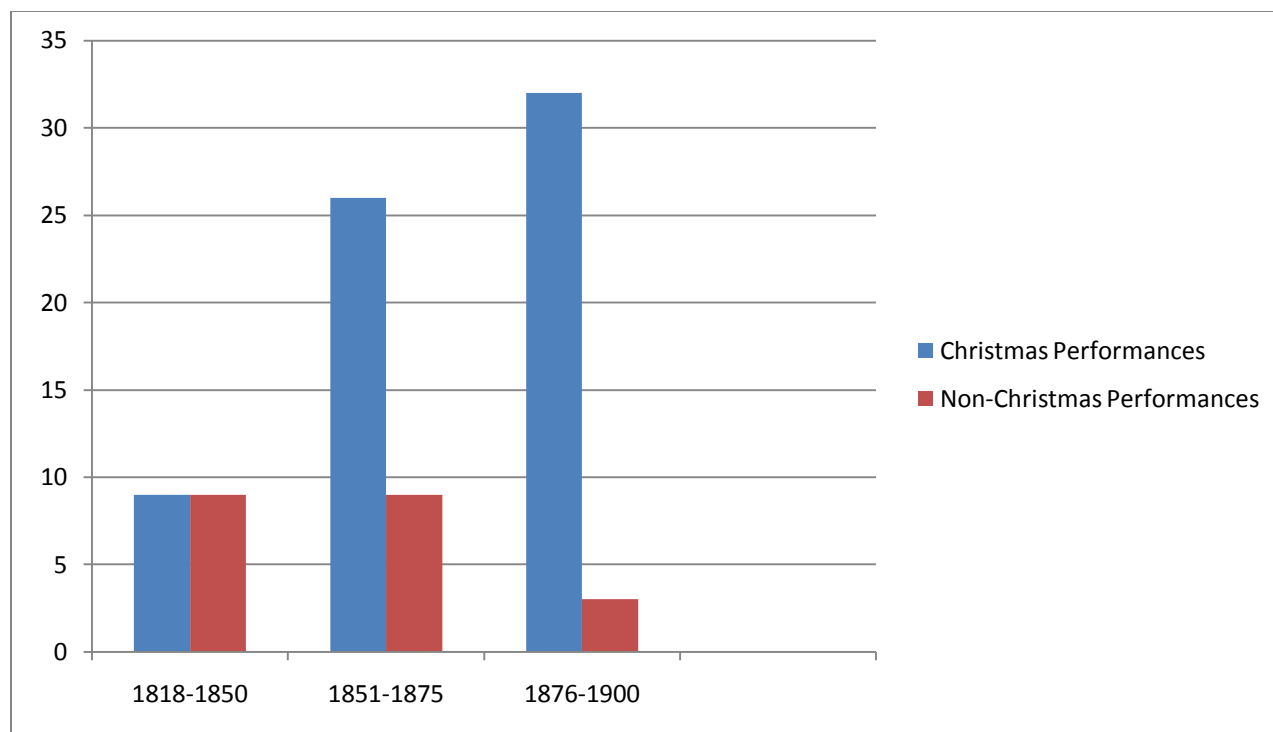


Figure 3.1: The Handel and Haydn Society's Nineteenth-Century *Messiah* Performances. 1818-1850: 9 Christmas Performances, 9 Non-Christmas Performances; 1851-1875: 26 Christmas Performances, 9 Non-Christmas Performances; 1876-1900: 33 Christmas Performances, 3 Non-Christmas Performances.

### A Changing Christmas

As American music culture began to define itself as something other than English in the early nineteenth century, the celebration of Christmas was undergoing changes as well. Both the religious perception of Christmas and the secular celebration of the holiday were changing, which led to a merged celebration that blended sacred and secular elements. The following section focuses on the issues surrounding the associations, conceptions, and ideology of Christmas in nineteenth-century America, and how they affected the perception of the Hallelujah Chorus.

#### *The History of Christmas*

Western Christianity's rationale for celebrating Christ's birth on 25 December has often come into question. Historical evidence has suggested a variety of probable birthdates for Christ, none of which coincides with the modern season of Christmastide, much less the exact date of 25 December. The decision to observe Jesus's Nativity on 25 December has nothing to do with the

actual date of his birth. According to John Storey's article "The Invention of the English Christmas," Christmas does not represent the day of Christ's birth but rather was intended as the day on which Christians would *celebrate* Christ's birth. The earliest Christians were aware that December was one of the least likely months in which Christ *could* have been born, and so the attempt to pinpoint the date of the Nativity's occurrence was never a factor in selecting 25 December as Christmas day.<sup>69</sup>

The original designation of 25 December as Christmas Day dates back to the fourth century. The Christian Church of Rome designated this date for the celebration of the Nativity in the year 336, shortly after Christianity was established as the government-sanctioned religion in the Holy Roman Empire. The reasons for the choice of this date were complicated and strategic. Christians chose a day that was already significant in European culture: the Day of the Birth of the Unconquered Sun was celebrated by followers of Mithraism, the main rival religion in Rome. Popular among the Roman militia, Mithraism was a pagan religion centered on the god of light, Mithras, whose birthday was on 25 December. By the fourth century Christianity had gained enough ground to compete with other religions, and it began by supplanting Mithraism. Realizing that they could not keep their own followers from attending social celebrations associated with Mithraism, and finding no scriptural indication of the date of Jesus's birth, Christians chose 25 December for two reasons: it both supplied them with a day to celebrate the Nativity and it helped to push aside a rival religion.<sup>70</sup> Though Mithraism had been successfully eliminated by the Christians by the fifth century, its pagan celebration on 25 December kept the legacy alive for centuries to come.

During the week prior to the winter solstice (between 20 and 23 December), Romans continued to engage in a festival consisting of drunkenness, feasting, and general debauchery. Social roles were often inverted, giving peasants governmental power and slaves the authority to direct their masters.<sup>71</sup> The overlapping of social festival and religious holy day eventually accomplished what the Christians had in mind when they designated 25 December as a holy day: the Christian population increased. Still, Church authorities had hoped for a smoother transition

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<sup>69</sup>John Storey, "The Invention of the English Christmas," in *Christmas, Ideology and Popular Culture*, Sheila Whiteley, ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 2008), 17.

<sup>70</sup>Storey, 17-18.

<sup>71</sup>Even as late as the early seventeenth century, Christmas was a time when citizens of England ran around changing clothes with whomever they encountered on the street.

and were displeased by the unruly behavior of the new converts, who often left church to attend festivities that originated in Mithraism.<sup>72</sup>

The political reasons for choosing 25 December as Christmas Day, along with the mixed nature of the seasonal celebrations, caused some branches of Christianity to try to ban its observance. In England the seventeenth-century Puritans wished to celebrate only biblical seasons, and since the Bible does not provide a season or date for the Nativity, they pressed Parliament to delete Christmas from the church calendar. On 3 July 1647 a ban on Christmas took effect in England.<sup>73</sup> Despite the ban, Parliament became aware of uncooperative citizens who were celebrating Christmas in secret and issued a proclamation on 24 December 1652, saying, “no observance shall be had of the five and twentieth of December, commonly called Christmas day; nor any solemnity used or exercised in churches upon that day in respect thereof.”<sup>74</sup> This ban remained in place until 1660, when the monarchy was restored, but the holiday was slow to regain its former importance or light-hearted celebration. Of Christmas’s return, Michael Harrison says,

Christmas came back . . . but he came back wearing something of the sober manner of the men who had temporarily driven him out. Old Christmas, in the twenty years that he had been officially outlawed, had lost much of his former jauntiness. It was a quieter Christmas who came back.<sup>75</sup>

There is some debate as to when a celebratory observance of Christmas was revived, but it is reasonable to say that its celebration remained quiet and uneventful for at least a century.

It is important to note that Christmas Day had not yet achieved a status special enough to set it apart from working, holding meetings, or other everyday activities. Such daily business was certainly taking place on 25 December during Parliament’s ban on celebrating Christmas, and this attitude toward the date continued through the early nineteenth century. In the first few decades of the nineteenth century, choral societies in America held business meetings along with singing sessions on Christmas Day.<sup>76</sup> Christmas may have been marked by a few small

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<sup>72</sup>Les Standiford, *The Man Who Invented Christmas: How Charles Dickens’s A Christmas Carol Rescued his Career and Revived our Holiday Spirits* (New York: Crown, 2008), 105-7.

<sup>73</sup>Storey, 19.

<sup>74</sup>Michael Patrick Hearn, *The Annotated Christmas Carol* (New York: Norton, 2004), 14.

<sup>75</sup>Michael Harrison, *The Story of Christmas* (London: Odhams, 1951), 146.

<sup>76</sup>It is clear by now that choral societies frequently ended their singing with the Hallelujah Chorus as a matter of tradition. It seems that these societies began holding their December meetings on the 25<sup>th</sup> as a way to slightly emphasize the holiday. This tradition seems to be the earliest occurrence of a convention of singing the Hallelujah Chorus on 25 December, but I do not believe this tradition has great significance or meaning. The



celebrations—perhaps a more elaborate meal and an evening church service— but by and large Christmas Day was like every other day. To discover when Christmas began to be set aside for celebration (by canceling other daily activities on the 25th), we can look to Charles Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol*. In the beginning of this familiar story, Scrooge, an old miser who is cruel and compassionless to his fellow man, complains bitterly when Bob Cratchit, his clerk, requests to take 25 December off to spend with his family. *A Christmas Carol* was published in 1843, so by this time Christmas Day had become generally recognized as a holiday from daily activities, though Scrooge’s reluctance to conform to this new holiday schedule shows the youth of the newer, celebratory practice; clearly, Scrooge can remember a time when everyone worked on Christmas Day.

Many scholars believe that *A Christmas Carol* played a significant role in Christmas’s transition from a quietly celebrated day to a season of good will, giving, and exuberance. Numerous sources refer to Charles Dickens as “the man who invented Christmas,”<sup>77</sup> crediting him with spreading the “Christmas spirit” to his readers’ world more or less single-handedly, as Cratchit, Scrooge’s nephew Fred, and the Spirits convert Scrooge within the novella. Other sources call this theory into question, arguing that Dickens’s book could not have resonated so successfully with its readers if the Christmas spirit displayed within it had not already been established.<sup>78</sup> Both theories contain elements of truth. For example, Cratchit’s request for a day off on Christmas presupposes that Scrooge would at least consider the request based on cultural convention, and Scrooge’s acquiescence (though grudging) could hardly seem likely otherwise. Nevertheless, Scrooge’s objection leads us to believe that such a holiday must have been a recent practice.

Assuming that a growing sense of a special Christmas spirit allowed Dickens’s book to experience such success, *A Christmas Carol* reinforced this development enormously. In America, at least, one of the first signs of a secular awareness of Christmas came with Clement Moore’s publication of “A Visit from St. Nicholas,” a whimsical poem that describes Santa Claus as a jolly and generous figure, with reindeer and a sleigh. Moore’s piece was published in

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members of the singing societies do not seem to have attached any Christmas association to the Hallelujah Chorus at this time.

<sup>77</sup>Standiford, 2.

<sup>78</sup>James H. Barnett, *The American Christmas: A Study in National Culture* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1954), 14-18; Sheila Whiteley, ed., *Christmas, Ideology and Popular Culture* (Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 24.

1823 and was read widely. The element of a Yuletide spirit of good will and charity was first widely popularized in secular society by *Christmas Carol*. The celebration of good will in Dickens's book, standing alongside the biblical Nativity story in religious consciousness, bridges the relationship between sacred and secular observances of the holiday.<sup>79</sup>

### ***Messiah* Becomes a Christmas Oratorio**

As shown in Figure 3.1, the Handel and Haydn Society's Christmas performances of *Messiah* had almost tripled the number of performances that were not held during Advent by the 1850s. The oratorio was certainly still performed during Lent, as well as at other times during the year without liturgical association, but the performance of *Messiah* became largely a Christmas event. The following section gives specific examples of a growing association between *Messiah*, the Hallelujah Chorus, and Christmas in order to show the progression of appropriation.

On 25 December 1841, Boston's *Daily Atlas* published an ad for a performance of the oratorio:

CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION,  
AND LAST PERFORMANCE OF THE GRAND ORATORIO OF  
**"THE MESSIAH."**

In accordance with its annual custom, and in commemoration of the advent of the Saviour of mankind, the HANDEL AND HAYDN SOCIETY will perform appropriate selections from the ORATORIO OF THE MESSIAH.<sup>80</sup>

In this example, a list of the included excerpts from *Messiah* is not available. The probability that the Hallelujah Chorus was one of these "appropriate selections" is high, based on its popularity. This example demonstrates the beginning of the convention to perform this oratorio at and associate it directly with Christmas. In a 15 December 1843 concert in Philadelphia, a "Grand Concert of Sacred Music" was given, and though no mention of Christmas exists in the advertisement, much of the program consists of music with a Christmas theme:

Part First.

- 1 Overture
- 2 Solo—Mrs. Watson and Chorus, arranged from the 103d Psalm, "Praise the Lord, my Soul"
- 3 Chorus—"To the Cherubim"
- 4 Recitative—Mrs. Watson, "O worse than death indeed" Air—"Angels ever bright and fair"

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<sup>79</sup>It should be noted that England and America were experiencing similar changes in the development of secular Christmas. The catalysts for the change in America existed in England first, and the two countries had almost parallel experiences. For instance, Dickens's publications arrived in America only weeks after they were released in London, and became extremely popular with U.S. readers.

<sup>80</sup>*Daily Atlas* 151 (25 December 1841), 3.

- 5 Solo—Mrs. Taylor, “With verdure clad.”  
 6 Chorus—“The Heavens are telling”  
 7 Recitative—Mrs. Watson, “There were Shepherds abiding in the field”  
 Andante—“And lo the Angel of the Lord.”  
 Recitative—“And suddenly there was with the Angels”  
 Chorus, “Glory to God in the highest”  
 8 Address—By L C Levin

Part Second

- 1 Overture.  
 2 Address—By Rev J. Chambers  
 3 The celebrated Hymn of the Reapers, Mrs. Watson, “Come to the Sunset Tree,” and Chorus  
 4 Recitative, Solo and Chorus, from the Oratorio of the Intercession.  
 5 Solo—Mrs. Taylor—“Would’st thou inherit Paradise” arranged from a German Air.  
 6 Duett—Mr Bird and Rutherford, from the Oratorio of David  
 7 New Solo—Mrs. Watson, written for this occasion by Samuel D. Patterson, Esq, adapted and arranged by Mr. Watson.  
 8 Solo and Trio—Mr Ashmend, Bird and Elsegood, “Music and Love.”  
 9 Grand Hallelujah Chorus, from the Oratoria [*sic*] of the Messiah.<sup>81</sup>

It is not until later that editions of the “Christmas Part” of *Messiah* that include the Hallelujah Chorus appear,<sup>82</sup> but this program is their predecessor. It includes other selections from the first part of *Messiah* as well as the Hallelujah Chorus.

In 1848 the Handel and Haydn Society advertised their 24 December concert in the *Daily Atlas* by naming the holiday:

CHRISTMAS EVE.  
 Handel’s oratorio of the  
**MESSIAH,**  
 Will be performed by the HANDEL AND HAYDN SOCIETY,  
 Sunday eve, December 24.<sup>83</sup>

In the same issue of the *Daily Atlas*, the same performance listed above is advertised with a mention of decorations:

ORATORIO OF THE MESSIAH.—This sublime composition, by Handel, will be performed tomorrow evening (Christmas Eve) by the Handel and Haydn Society, at the Melodeon. Mr. Hatton has volunteered his services, and will sing some of the principal songs in the Oratorio. The Hall will be tastefully decorated for the occasion.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>81</sup>*Public Ledger* 71 (15 December 1843), 1.

<sup>82</sup>The earliest instance I found was 1912, though I cannot be certain that this is the earliest publication of this type of edition. E.g., G. F. Handel, *The Messiah: An Oratorio*, ed. T. Tertius Noble (New York: G. Schirmer, 1912), ix.

<sup>83</sup>*Daily Atlas* 148 (23 December 1848), 3.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*, 2.

This example's mention of tasteful decorations for the occasion shows the simultaneous appropriation of *Messiah* as a Christmas oratorio and the parallel creation of decorative traditions that are modernly associated with Christmas.

As Figure 3.1 showed, the 1850s began a period in which Christmas performances of *Messiah* far outnumbered non-Christmas performances. The Handel and Haydn Society's tradition of performing the oratorio annually on Christmas began in 1854 and, as was the case with all activities of this choral society, influenced other choirs greatly in their choice of repertoire. The society's annual tradition was preceded in 1851 by a performance of *Messiah* on Christmas Day, advertised on 24 December:

**THE ORATORIO OF THE MESSIAH.** This sublime composition is to be performed tomorrow evening by the Handel and Haydn society of our city in compliment to that great natal day which so vast a body of Christians throughout our land are now preparing to celebrate.<sup>85</sup>

This example is valuable in that it shows the Christmas association with the oratorio, but also in that it shows the growth of acknowledgement of the Christmas season in America.

In 1856 the Handel and Haydn Society advertised their performance on 8 December, saying they would perform "at Christmas."<sup>86</sup> Though the Handel and Haydn Society had effectively appropriated *Messiah* for Christmas by performing it annually on Christmas Day, this 22 December 1859 advertisement confirms this association:

THE HANDEL AND HAYDN SOCIETY WILL GIVE THEIR ANNUAL  
CHRISTMAS ORATORIO,

**THE MESSIAH,**

On Sunday Evening, December 25, 1859

At the

BOSTON MUSIC HALL.<sup>87</sup>

In numerous advertisements *Messiah* is repeatedly associated with Christmas, establishing it as a "Christmas oratorio." Lenten performances certainly still existed, but as Christmas rose in importance in America, the oratorio shed the association with the Easter season that it had had in Europe.

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<sup>85</sup>*Boston Evening Transcript* 4718 (24 December 1845), 2.

<sup>86</sup>*Boston Evening Transcript* 8112 (8 December 1856), 2.

<sup>87</sup>*Boston Daily Courier* 64 (22 December 1859), 3.

Advertisements for *Messiah* as “The Christmas Oratorio” continued in the 1860s, so much so that this became a secondary title for *Messiah*. During the 1840s and 50s the oratorio had been identified first by its title and composer, both of which appeared in the largest font in the ad. The majority of ads in the 1860s showed “Christmas Oratorio” in the largest font, with the composer and title given under it in smaller font. This change is minor, but shows that the oratorio had truly come to represent the new and improved Christmas season.

The Handel and Haydn Society  
Will give their annual  
**CHRISTMAS ORATORIO,**  
THE MESSIAH,  
At the  
Boston Music Hall<sup>88</sup>

The *Saturday Evening Gazette* published a similar ad in 1863:

HANDEL AND HAYDN SOCIETY,  
**CHRISTMAS ORATORIO.**  
In accordance with a time honored custom,  
THE MESSIAH!  
Will be given by the  
HANDEL AND HAYDN SOCIETY  
At the  
BOSTON MUSIC HALL<sup>89</sup>

In 1864 *The New York Times* published a particularly interesting article regarding the celebration of Christmas in various churches around New York. This article shows quite a bit of development in the celebration of Christmas in America as well as an association of Christmas with *Messiah* and the Hallelujah Chorus:

RELIGIOUS SERVICES TO-DAY.

How Christmas will be Observed in Some of the Churches—Splendid Decorations and Superb Musical Programmes—The Festivities of Christmas Eve.

To-day, the Christian Church throughout the world will celebrate the birth of our Saviour. To-day, the grand anthem of his incarnation will be sung by millions of voices. To-day, all over the land there will be merry greetings and happy hearts. To-day, the children of all Christendom will rejoice over presents drawn from the ample stores of Santa Claus, and to-day the high and the low, the rich and the poor, on land and on sea, wherever the Christian religion is

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<sup>88</sup>*Boston Daily Advertiser* 15092 (24 December 1862), 1.

<sup>89</sup>*Saturday Evening Gazette* 51 (19 December 1863), 3.

recognized, will bow in humble adoration of the event which gave to the world the Redeemer. The day occurring this year on Sunday, the services in the churches in this city will be more than usually interesting. Many of our temples of worship have been most elaborately decorated, and the forests and gardens have been stripped of their choice holly and balsam to honor the sacred occasion. The lady members of the various churches have employed much of their time, for several days past, in plaiting evergreens and tastefully arranging them in honor of the services to-day. Trinity Church has been elaborately decorated. The scene inside the edifice is exceedingly beautiful, and from porch to chancel is one of triumph. Three arches extend across the apsis through which a view is obtained of the chancel. Each arch is surrounded by a cross of evergreens, the center one bearing a star symbolical of the Star of Bethlehem and the Light of the world. The most careful attention is displayed in the decoration of the altar, pulpit, chorister's desks, lectern and font. The church is otherwise superbly decorated. Rev. Drs. Vinton and Ogilby will officiate to-day, and the annexed programme of music will be followed:

The Venite will be sung to a chant by Woodward, and the proper Psalms for Christmas Day (the XIXth, XLVth, and LXXXVth) will be chanted antiphonally. The service (*Te Deum* and *Jubilate*) will be sung to Kempton in B flat. The great feature of the music, however, will be the Anthem, which has been selected from the Messiah. It will open with two solos by Mr. Geo. S. Weeks, the principal tenor—the words being “Comfort ye my people,” and “Every valley shall be exalted.” It will close with a grand chorus on the words, “And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed.”

In the morning:

Recitative, “And there were shepherds.”

Chorus, “Glory to God in the Highest,”

W. Berge and chorus of 4 voices.

The 10<sup>th</sup> selection of Psalms chanted antiphonally

By a double quartette.

Chorus, “Unto us a Child is born,” from the Messiah,

By W. Berge and chorus.

After the sermon, the Grand Hallelujah Chorus from the Messiah.

At the ante-communion and communion Dr. Cutler's service in E will be sung.<sup>90</sup>

The article continues for several paragraphs, detailing the decorations in various churches in New York. Though the article presents far more information about the religious than the secular observance of the day, it reflects the merging of sacred and secular Christmas cultures.

Furthermore, this is one of the earliest examples of the Hallelujah Chorus's association explicitly

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<sup>90</sup>*New York Times* (25 December 1864), 1.

with Christmas outside the context of the entire oratorio. From this point on, examples will focus on the Hallelujah Chorus.

In 1871 Holy Trinity Church of Harlem published its music program for Christmas Day, consisting mostly of pieces from *Messiah*, but with special arrangements for the Hallelujah Chorus:

At the Holy Trinity Church, Harlem, of which Rev. W. Neilson McVickar is rector, services will commence at 10 ½ A.M. The musical services will include a pastoral symphony on the organ, “There Were Shepherds,” (solo from the *Messiah*;) chorus, “Glory to God;” anthem, “Behold a Virgin,” and chorus, “O Thou that Tellest,” (from the *Messiah*;) hymn, “Hark, the Herald Angels;” the hallelujah chorus and hymn No. 143. In the grand chorus from the *Messiah* the choir will be assisted by a large number of ladies and gentlemen of the congregation and others, who have volunteered their aid.<sup>91</sup>

In 1874 The *New York Herald* published an article titled “Christmas music in the Churches” listing the program for various services in New York. The Church of the Holy Trinity, on Forty-Second Street, and Zion Church, on Thirty-Eighth Street, both offered the Hallelujah Chorus as part of their program, along with other selections from Part 1 of *Messiah* and other sacred music.<sup>92</sup> Likewise, in 1876 Grace Church in Boston published its program for Christmas Day, including the Hallelujah Chorus as the final piece.<sup>93</sup>

The 1870s are the first decade when the Hallelujah Chorus seems to have appeared as a Christmas piece without the rest of the oratorio. *Messiah*'s Christmas performances continued to increase, but this decade is the first to show a convention of using the Hallelujah Chorus as a piece appropriate for the season. Furthermore, the publication of planned programs for church services shows a sharp increase in the acknowledgement and celebration of the season.

The December newspapers of the 1880s, like those of the 70s, are full of published programs for Christmas Church services, many of which include the Hallelujah Chorus. The chorus is well established as special music for Christmas Day, as illustrated in this advertisement:

Tabernacle Baptist Church, 2D Av., Between 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> sts., Rev Robert B Hull, pastor.—Morning—Special Christmas sermon, with Christmas music and Hallelujah Chorus rendered by the choir and Sunday school.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup>*New York Times* (24 December 1871), 8.

<sup>92</sup>*New York Herald* 359 (25 December 1874), 6.

<sup>93</sup>*Boston Daily Advertiser* 150 (23 December 1876), 4.

<sup>94</sup>*New York Herald* 16196 (25 December 1880), 1.

In the following quotation the celebration of Christmas is clear, but more importantly the Hallelujah Chorus has been arranged for the organ. Only music that is familiar and traditional can be transformed from choral into instrumental and still preserve its associated significance.

#### CHRISTMAS FESTIVITIES.

Interesting Exercises by the Sunday School of the Arch Street M. E. Church.

The Christmas exercises of the Sunday-school of the Arch Street M. E. Church, corner of Broad and Arch streets, took place last evening in the presence of a large congregation. The church was handsomely decorated with festoons of evergreen, and on the eastern wall was a large globe of evergreens, with a white band across it, bearing the inscription "Peace on Earth."

The exercises were commenced with the following selections on the organ: Rossini's "William Tell" and Meyerbeer's "Coronation," followed by the anthem "Shout the glad tidings;" a prayer by the pastor, Rev. Andrew Longacre, D. D.; the carol, "The Angel's Proclamation;" responsive reading by the school, and a carol by the little ones.

An address was made by Hon. George S. Graham, and after the carol, "Ring the Merry Christmas Bell," very nicely sung by the little ones, an address was made by the pastor, Rev. Dr. Longacre, who hoped the children had had a merry Christmas. The beautiful part of the Christmas time is not the getting, but the giving.

A collection was made on behalf of the M. E. Orphanage, after which boxes of candies and fruit were distributed to the scholars. The exercises concluded with the benediction by the pastor and the "Hallelujah chorus" on the organ.<sup>95</sup>

The programming of the Rossini and Meyerbeer items shows a trend of including famous musical works from the high art culture in Christmas services. These works have a sense of grandeur that was sometimes used to celebrate Christmas despite their lack of relevant content. Objectively, Rossini, Meyerbeer, and Handel could be grouped together as high art music that has nothing to do with Christmas, but the congregation's perception of the Hallelujah Chorus as a piece for Christmas allows it to form a bridge between the instrumental, high art pieces and the carols that made up the rest of the program.

The announcements and reports of the 1880s continued to show that the Hallelujah Chorus had a special place in the Christmas music repertoire, but they also give evidence of the practice of altering the piece in ways that are only successful with music that is comfortable and

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<sup>95</sup>*Philadelphia Inquirer* 111 (27 December 1884), 2.



familiar. Though the chorus had only been a Christmas piece for a few decades, its popularity and association with the season enabled it to be used in many versatile ways.

To further the point made above about the adaptability of familiar pieces, this item shows that the Hallelujah Chorus has been taken out of its intended context:

**Christmas at the Middle Dutch Church.**

The children of the Sunday school and Industrial School of the Middle Dutch Church, at Second Avenue and Seventh Street, will have a Christmas celebration on Monday morning in the church. The Rev. Dr. Chambers and the Rev. John Hutchins will make brief addresses. In the musical part of the service, "For Unto Us a Child is Born" and the "Hallelujah Chorus" from Handel's "Messiah" will be rendered by the children.<sup>96</sup>

The level of skill required to perform these choruses certainly exceeds that typically found in children's choirs in America at that time. This report seems to indicate either that a simplified version of the music was used or an extraordinary effort on the part of the choir members.

In 1893 the *Philadelphia Inquirer* published the Christmas music program of the West Spruce Street Presbyterian Church, with the Hallelujah Chorus as the only piece composed by Handel. Here we see the Hallelujah Chorus become not only equal with selections from Part 1 of *Messiah*, but preferable as Christmas music.

RELIGIOUS NOTICES.

Presbyterian.

CHRISTMAS MUSIC WEST SPRUCE STREET PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

MORNING SERVICE

Anthem, "O, Come, All Ye faithful", Novello

Anthem, "Glory to God", Mozart

Anthem, "Except the Lord", Gilchrist

Anthem, "The Heavens are Telling", Haydn

EVENING SERVICE

Anthem, "O, Sing to God", Gounod

Anthem, (a) "Say, Where Is He Born", Mendelssohn

(b) "There Shall Be a Star.", Mendelssohn

Solo, "Bethlehem", Coomba

Anthem, "There Were Shepherds", Wareing

Anthem, "Ring Out, Wild Bells", Gounod-Gilchrist

Anthem, "Hallelujah Chorus", Messiah<sup>97</sup>

Musical programs continued to represent the majority of mentions of the Hallelujah Chorus in newspapers. The other music performed on these occasions was sacred, though Christmas carols

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<sup>96</sup>*New York Times* (23 December 1892), 6.

<sup>97</sup>*Philadelphia Inquirer* 176 (23 December 1893), 6.

appeared increasingly in the 80s and 90s, reflecting a mixture of high art music and more popular genres. Whereas the papers of the 70s contained only text and formal language, those of the 80s and 90s reflect the jolly spirit of Santa Claus, who appeared in various drawings on the same pages with concert bills. Below are two items from a single page of the 25 December 1897 *Philadelphia Inquirer*. The mixture of sacred and secular themes increased considerably during the last decade of this century.



CLAUS AND THE "MERRIE CHRISTMAS CLUBS" TREE

#### A QUARTET CHOIR.

The quartet choir at the Presbyterian church at Wyncote will give the following music during the services December 26: Festival Te Deum, E flat, Dudley Buck; Jubilate in G, Vogrich, and "Nazareth," Gounod. Mrs. Weeder, soprano; Miss Yoder, contralto; E. J. Hill, tenor; J. C. Cousans, basso and choirmaster.

At West Green Street, Presbyterian Church, Nineteenth and Green streets, James N. Knipe, choirmaster, and Dr. H. L. Morse, organist, the Christmas music will also be sung on the following Sabbath, including: Prelude, organ and violin, "Adagio," Becker; carol, "Long Ago a Star Was Shining," Schilling; Festival Te Deum in E flat, Buck; anthem, "Arise! Shine!" Reed; anthem, "The Manger of Bethlehem," Havens; organ postlude, "Hallelujah Chorus," Handel; organ prelude, "Chant Seraphique," Guilmant; anthem, "Sing, O Heavens," Tours; anthem, "There Were Shepherds," Buck; anthem, "The Birthday of a King," Neidlinger; organ postlude, "Festival Recessional," Morse.

The chart below (Figure 3.2) allows a view of the growing Christmas association of both *Messiah* and the Hallelujah Chorus, showing what percentage of year-round newspaper references to either *Messiah* or the Hallelujah Chorus occurred during the Christmas season. The newspaper items included are most typically performance announcements, calls for rehearsals, sheet music sales, and, eventually, radio broadcast schedules from Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. This data is based solely on dates and includes performances etc. that occurred during December but do not necessarily include any acknowledgement of the Christmas season.

For instance, the data representing the 1830s does not include a single reference to Christmas, though some items are announcing performances for 25 December.

Methodologically, this information was gathered from digital newspaper archives, namely *America's Historical Newspapers 1690-1922* and the *New York Times* database. Data was collected by way of electronic searches for either "Hallelujah Chorus" or "Messiah" and "Handel," and the results were divided into Christmas performances and non-Christmas performances from which percentages were calculated.

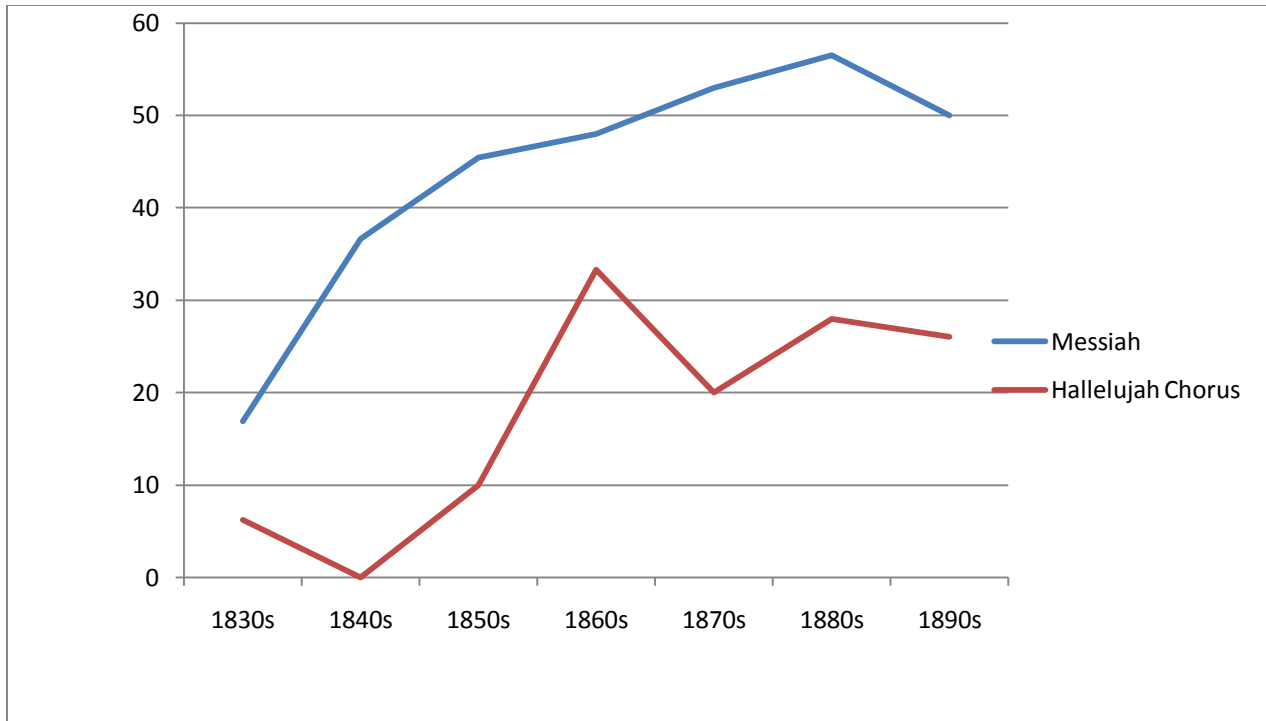


Figure 3.2: Data reflecting the percentage of year-round newspaper references to *Messiah* and the Hallelujah Chorus during the Christmas Season. The data is compiled from *Boston Daily Advertiser*, *Boston Daily Courier*, *Boston Evening Transcript*, *Boston Journal*, *Boston Post*, *Daily Atlas*, *Emancipator and Republican*, *Liberator*, and *Saturday Evening Gazette* in Boston; *American Sentinel*, *Copway's American Indian*, *Emancipator*, *Irish World*, *Mercury*, *New York American*, *New York Herald*, *New York Herald-Tribune*, *New York Ledger*, *New York Times*, *Wall Street Daily News*, and *Weekly Herald* in New York City; *North American*, *Pennsylvania Freeman*, *Philadelphia Evening Post*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Press*, and *Public Ledger* in Philadelphia.

Both *Messiah* and the Hallelujah Chorus were solidified as Christmas music by the end of the nineteenth century. *Messiah* gained its status as "Christmas Oratorio" in the 1850s and 60s; the 60s and 70s experienced the increasing development of the new style in observance of the Christmas season, characterized by exuberant celebrations that combined both sacred and secular

traditions; the Hallelujah Chorus began to stand alone as a Christmas piece in the 70s and 80s, and it gained the popularity and familiarity that allowed its adaptation in the end of the century. Almost every reported performance of the Hallelujah Chorus took place in a church, though few of the services recorded remain exclusively in the high art tradition. This convention of mixing art music with popular music and sacred with secular themes allowed the Hallelujah Chorus to enter the twentieth century poised for diverse possibilities.

## CHAPTER 4

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

*Messiah* remains Handel's most familiar work in the twenty-first century, and of the pieces in *Messiah*, the Hallelujah Chorus is best known. Handel's compositional turn to the genre of oratorio (which was, at the time, intended for the Lenten season) was a reaction to his declining success as a composer of Italian opera. Though *Messiah* was not Handel's first oratorio, the success of this work seemed for him to justify this new genre. The popularity of the oratorio was established in London in time to make an impression on William Tuckey before he immigrated to New York in 1751. Tuckey introduced seventeen excerpts of *Messiah* to America in 1770, and though the exact program is unavailable, the rapid spread of the Hallelujah Chorus indicates that it was among the pieces debuted in Tuckey's concert. By the time the entire oratorio had its American première in Boston in 1818, the chorus had become the most popular ending piece for choral concerts in America's musical capitals.

Within twenty-five years after *Messiah*'s debut and popularization, the observance of the Nativity in America began its transformation from a religious holiday unacknowledged by the secular community to the celebratory style of the modern Christmas season. Through the combined loosening of the Puritans' grip on Christmas and the advocacy for goodwill and merriment during Christmastide beginning in the 1840s, 25 December steadily gained sacred and secular meaning and importance. The changes to the celebration of Christmas helped to popularize seasonal performances of *Messiah*, quickly transforming it into a Christmas oratorio. Since the Hallelujah Chorus was already widely known by the time the complete *Messiah* arrived in America (though without any seasonal association—not even Lenten), the piece became representative of its oratorio, making for the piece's easy appropriation to the Christmas season.

A look into the Hallelujah Chorus's treatment during the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries would reveal continuing change in the piece's exact meaning. For instance, in the 1940s the Hallelujah Chorus's usual exuberant and celebratory status was put aside, and the chorus was instead used to instill hope in people during World War II and remind them of happier times.<sup>98</sup> By the 1970s, as the movement for historically informed performance reached its height, considerable attention was being given to exactly how the oratorio would have been

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<sup>98</sup>*New York Times* (10 December 1945), 17.

performed in Handel's day.<sup>99</sup> During the Christmas following the terrorist attack of 11 September 2001 the Hallelujah Chorus was performed at Trinity Church in New York to instill the spirit of resurrection in its listeners. In this particular example, the choir director noted Handel's intentions for the chorus as a Lenten work but felt they were appropriate to uplift the spirits of its listeners during Christmas.<sup>100</sup>

It is, of course, axiomatic in the history of music that the treatment of an iconic piece of music does not remain stable over time. As the culture in which music exists changes, the uses, perceptions, and understanding of that music change correspondingly. This phenomenon, strikingly exemplified in the case of the Hallelujah Chorus, points to the more significant truth that music does not possess culture—that is to say, music has no cultural meaning outside of cultural context. Musical meaning is dependent on context—the context in which it was written, the context of its performance, or the context of appropriation, etc. The combination of music's adaptability to varied cultural appropriations and the extreme popularity of a work has produced reappropriation in more cases than the Hallelujah Chorus. Beethoven's Fifth Symphony has been used to represent death and victory; the Ninth has represented both extreme joy and extreme violence. Music that is popular enough to reach past the confines of concert halls and "classical" recordings to television commercials and seasonal background noise—that is music that extends to many, diverse types of audiences—gains a versatility that is possible because the wider audience is not concerned with the original historical meaning or authenticity of a piece. In the case of the Hallelujah Chorus, this popularity-induced versatility allowed and continues to allow the piece to be sacred, secular, a great interest in music scholarship, and an icon of popular Christmas culture.

A variety of circumstances contributed to the striking phenomenon of the Hallelujah Chorus's dissociation from its Lenten origins and its becoming an icon for Christmas. The underlying circumstances that led to this change reveal broad cultural values of music listeners, as a series of American contexts allowed the appropriation of the Hallelujah Chorus for Christmas. As this thesis has demonstrated, the Hallelujah Chorus arrived in America detached from the context of its oratorio, providing Americans the freedom to popularize the piece in a way that might not have been possible, had the complete *Messiah*, as an integral whole, crossed

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<sup>99</sup>*New York Times* (17 December 1972), D21.

<sup>100</sup>*New York Times* (17 December 2001), E1.

the ocean in 1770. Through the impulse to develop a creative culture that was independent from England's during the nineteenth century, Americans naturally and quickly relinquished their colonial predecessor's reliance on English ways of treating music. Thus, the tendency to move performances of the oratorio away from its original context in Lent, as well as to extract the Hallelujah Chorus and treat it as an independent work were unconstrained by Old-World practices. Simultaneously, America was experiencing a major shift in cultural values associated with Christmas. The move from restrained and sober observances of the holy day toward seasonal celebration and public festivity created a setting in which *Messiah* and its most celebrated and celebratory number easily found a new place to thrive and a new cultural meaning.

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## **BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

In the spring of 2008, Leah Harrison completed her Bachelor of Music in Music History with a minor in Philosophy at Converse College, graduating *magna cum laude* and with special Honors in Field distinction. Under the advisement of Dr. Douglass Seaton, she obtained her Master of Music degree from the Department of Musicology at The Florida State University in fall of 2010. She enrolled in the doctoral program in 2010. Leah's research interests include music appropriation, American reception history of canonic Western works, audience cognition, music and place, and Appalachian music.