

## Program Note

by Dr Nalini Ghuman

In 1713 Britain, France and Spain signed the Treaty of Utrecht which brought to an end the War of the Spanish Succession. The *Te Deum* and *Jubilate* of **George Frederic Handel** (1685-1759) were given their first performance on 7 July 1713 at the thanksgiving service in St Paul's cathedral celebrating the Peace of Utrecht.

It is doubtful that Handel had foreseen the Peace of Utrecht when he completed the work in January, but he was obviously saving the *Te Deum* for a particularly festive occasion that would have special impact on the English. A better time could not have presented itself than the Peace of Utrecht of 31 March 1713. The official London proclamation was on 5 May and the Thanksgiving designated for July which gave Handel time to add the expected *Jubilate*. Following this event the Queen, influenced by a petition from Handel's supporters (since she had not actually attended the service!), finally put her seal of approval on Handel by granting him an annual pension of 200 pounds. Handel had thus established himself with the English nobility, an almost insurmountable task for a German!

Prior to settling in London (where he had become a frequent visitor) in 1713, Handel had sojourned in Italy for four years, returning to his native Germany in 1710 to assume the post of Kapellmeister to the Elector of Hanover, soon to become King George I of England (nothing English about the English monarchy!). In June 1713, he was dismissed from his Hanover post for reasons that probably relate to his involvement in the celebrations of the Treaty of Utrecht (which was against Hanoverian interests); he may also have intimated that he would prefer to remain in England. The Hanoverian representative in London, C. F. Kreienberg, expressed anxiety at the breach (for the surprising reason that Handel would no longer be sending reports on Queen Anne's failing health obtained via his friendship with John Arbuthnot, her physician). Matters were resolved, however, and after entering Queen Anne's service he was assured that he would continue to serve when the elector became king. When George succeeded to the crown in 1714 he kept his word: Handel's arrears of salary from Hanover were paid and his new *Te Deum* was sung in the king's presence on 26 September.

The London years were very productive for Handel: he wrote a succession of Italian operas - *Il pastor fido*, *Teseo*, *Silla*, and *Amadigi di Gaula*, in addition to keyboard music, and works for royal occasions, most notably the *Te Deum* and *Jubilate*. Designed for a special celebration, these ebullient pieces are scored for large instrumental forces, along with soloists and chorus; the most obvious models are Henry Purcell's *Te Deum* in D major and the *Thanksgiving Anthem* of William Croft.

The affinity with the vivacious style of choral writing Handel encountered in Italy is abundantly clear from the opening bars. In contrast, the movements in the minor all involve soloists and are full of striking suspensions, especially "We believe that thou shalt come" (with *obbligato* flute) and "Vouchsafe, O Lord." But the weight of the anthem is firmly thrown on the chorus, and we hear Handel's first use of the juxtaposition of homophonic and contrapuntal styles within a short section. Listen, for example, to the chorus' exclamation in the fifth movement, "Thou did'st open the Kingdom of Heaven to all Believers," which is followed immediately by a fugal passage - "Thou sittest at the Right hand of God." While Handel was certainly acquainted with both styles, their employment in such close proximity is purely English. Indeed, in composing the *Te Deum* and *Jubilate* - his first English settings - he had mastered the English style successfully. They were very well received in London, and for many years, they alternated with Purcell's *Te Deum* (1694) at the annual St Cecilia's Day service, until they were replaced by Handel's own Dettingen settings in 1743.

\*\*\*

The *Vesperae Solennes de Confessore* were written in 1780, the year after **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart** (1756-1791) had reluctantly returned home to take up the role of court organist to Hieronymus Colloredo, the Prince Archbishop of Salzburg. His duties included playing in the cathedral, at court and in the chapel, and instructing the choirboys. During this period, he composed the joyful *Coronation Mass* and the two wonderful sets of *Vespers*, along with the *Missa solennis* and the *Regina coeli*. Yet Colloredo was not satisfied! He appointed Michael Haydn as court and cathedral organist in 1782 in Mozart's place with the proviso that "he show more diligence ... and compose more often for our cathedral and chamber music [than Mozart]." Perhaps it was the abundance of instrumental and theatrical works which Mozart composed that led to Colloredo's dissatisfaction, since these would not have been heard at court: the Concerto for two pianos, the Sonata for piano and violin, the symphonies K318, 319 and 338, the 'Posthorn' Serenade K320, the Divertimento, K334 the Sinfonia concertante for violin and viola, along with incidental music for *Thamos, König in Ägypten* and *Zaide*.

Performed in Salzburg's splendid cathedral in 1781, *Vesperae Solennes de Confessore* is a jubilant and finely-crafted sequence of the traditional psalm settings for Vespers. Mozart chose to set Psalms 110-113, 117 and the *Magnificat*, reserving the full instrumentation – bassoon, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, violins, organ and continuo – for the outer "Dixit" and "Magnificat" sections. The presence of trumpets and drums suggests that the score was intended for use on the eve (or possibly on the day) of a *Festum Pallii*, an important feast day in Salzburg. As you'll hear, "Solennes" ("solemn") does not, in this context, mean gloomy or dismal! Rather it means "celebrated with full liturgical ceremony" and – to the eternal delight of the listener – Mozart's settings invoke the other original meanings of "solemn" – "sublime" and "awe-inspiring."

Mozart's Vespers follow the *Brevis* rule in effect in Vienna and Salzburg at the time. There are no orchestral movements, and there is only one movement predominantly for a soloist: the hauntingly beautiful *Laudate Dominum* scored for soprano, strings, organ and bassoon. For one who had such limitations of scope placed upon him, the diversity of musical styles Mozart employs is quite remarkable. From the quasi-symphonic style of the "Dixit Dominus" and "Confitebor" to the dramatically operatic ensemble style of the "Beatus vir" to the learned *stile antico* fugal writing of the "Laudate pueri," the 24-year-old composer admirably displays his imagination and skill. For the "Laudate Dominum" Mozart composed one of his most memorably beautiful melodies; an operatic aria worthy of the Countess Rosina herself. While in the *Magnificat*, one can easily imagine the young Virgin Mary excitedly telling Elisabeth that she is to be the Mother of the Son of God. Throughout the piece Mozart is always sensitive to the meaning of the text he is setting. A vivid example among many is the way he sets the words "et divites dimissit inanes" (and the rich he hath sent away empty) in the *Magnificat*, where, after a mighty diminished seventh chord the music – and the rich – wander off aimlessly. The music abounds with such artful inventiveness, and delights the listener with its richness and depth. The *Vesperae* was among the last pieces that Mozart wrote in Salzburg and magnificently represents his musical legacy there.