

Understanding Classical Music Group

The subject of the February meeting was the composer George Frideric Handel. Handel was born in 1685 in Germany. His father was a physician. When Handel began to show an interest in music his father is said to have refused to let his son play any instrument at home, considering music to be an unworthy pursuit. However, Handel reputedly hid a clavichord in the attic where he practised in secret.

His musical talent was spotted aged 8 or 9 when he was heard playing the organ on a visit to the palace of Duke Adolf where his father was physician. The Duke recommended Handel be found a tutor - a recommendation not to be ignored. The organist at the local parish church, Friedrich Zachow, was engaged and Handel trained as an organist. Because of Zachow's personal interests Handel was exposed to a great variety of music – German, French, Italian – as well as the classical modes of composition, fugues, canon, and counterpoint. By the age of 17 he was organist at the cathedral.

In 1703 Handel joined the orchestra of Hamburg Opera House and whilst there he wrote his first opera. After Hamburg, Handel lived in Italy for four years where he learnt the Italian art of treating the human voice as a musical instrument and the Italian approach to cantatas, both of which influenced his future compositions.

From Italy, Handel made his way to London via Hanover. By the time he reached London he was already internationally famous. He obtained British nationality in 1727. In London he prepared Italian-type opera for the theatres until this type of music eventually fell out of favour with the public. Handel then invented the oratorio, effectively opera without staging or costumes, which proved so popular with concert goers.

Handel became a benefactor of the Foundling Hospital and it was to this organisation that he granted the performance rights for the Messiah.

Our next meeting will be on **Friday 26th April** 10.00am at **STARTFORTH SCHOOL** when the subject will be the life and works of the composer Jean Sibelius.

Contact: Bill Heyes - Email: wfhey@btinternet.com, Tel 01833 640885