

Mesmerizing the Masses Since 1742

Written by Margaret Evans, Editor
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In April of 1742, George Frideric Handel's *Messiah*



ignited the stage of Dublin's Musick Hall, where a record-breaking 700 people had turned out for the superstar composer. (The ladies had been asked by management to wear “dresses without hoops, to make room for more company.”) From the first strains of the tenor's opening lines –

Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God – the massive audience sat spellbound, completely enthralled. The following year, *Messiah*

made its London debut, where legend has it the “Hallelujah” chorus moved King George II to his feet.

More than two centuries later, a little girl was growing up in Alabama, the child of parents who sang in the community theatre and the church choir. They had many daughters, and their house was always filled with music. The little girl knew her Bach and Handel as well as she knew her Rodgers & Hammerstein, and she loved it all, but especially *Messiah*. The oratorio

was strange and marvelous to her ears, difficult to sing but impossible
not
to as it rang through her house at Christmas and Easter and plenty of other times, too.

Three decades passed. Now that little girl was a middle-aged woman sitting with her own little girl on the front pew at First Presbyterian Church of Beaufort – it wasn't her church; she didn't have one – listening to the choir perform the Christmas part of Handel's *Messiah*, and quietly weeping. As the power of that music washed over her – at once familiar and absolutely new – she found something she'd lost more than 20 years earlier, after leaving home for college. She wasn't sure what to call it exactly – that
something
she'd lost and found – but when the service ended, she joined the choir . . . and later, the church.

That little girl, that woman, was me. And now it's almost a decade later, and Handel's *Messiah*
has once again entered my life like a bright, beatific thunderbolt.

On December 5th, the Sea Island Chamber Singers will perform the Christmas part of *Messiah*
at the USCB Center for the Arts . . . and I'll be with them. Hallelujah! (Yes, we're throwing in that perennial favorite, too, though it's officially an Easter chorus.)

We've been practicing every Sunday night for the past couple of months, which merely underscores my dedication. Traditionally, Sunday's when I call my mother in Alabama; we both pour ourselves a big glass of wine and settle in for a lengthy chat. While I'm catching up with Mom, Jeff's usually making something yummy for dinner – with our schedules, it's one of the few nights we can all eat together – and then we unwind with our daughter before the school/work week is upon us again. In short, I treasure my Sunday nights. I wouldn't give them up for just anybody.

But George F. Handel's not just anybody. And neither is Charles D. Frost. Charlie's the

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