

HANDEL: MESSIAH

**Irish Baroque Orchestra
and Choir**

Peter Whelan, director

**December 5, 7.30pm
National Opera House, Wexford**

**December 6, 7.45pm
St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin**

Mary Bevan, soprano
Jess Dandy, contralto
Alexander Chance, countertenor
Nathan Mercieca, countertenor
Anthony Gregory, tenor
Seán Boylan, baritone
William Gaunt, bass



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MESSIAH

G.F. Handel

HWV 56

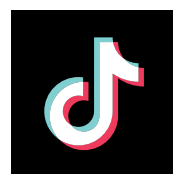
First performed on Fishamble Street, Dublin on April 13th 1742.

As we enter into a collective listening experience we ask you to please check that your phones are off or on silent.

Please refrain from unauthorised photography or filming while the performance is in progress.

The performance at the National Opera House, Wexford is being recorded by RTÉ Lyric fm for broadcast at 7pm on Saturday 20th December.

Find us online:



www.irishbaroqueorchestra.com

A heartfelt welcome to our annual performances of Handel's Messiah - a cherished tradition in our annual calendar that brings us together in celebration of music, community, and the spirit of the season.

Each year, Messiah offers us a moment to pause, reflect, and reconnect with a piece that sits at the centre of our artistic mission and continues to inspire us centuries after it was first heard.

As I look back on another remarkable year for the Irish Baroque Orchestra, I am filled with gratitude and pride. In a year that included our BBC Proms debut, we have continued to build community and reach around our work. From sold-out cushion concerts and inspiring schools programmes at home, to the most prestigious international stages, our musicians, supporters, and audiences have made this season truly historic. The IBO's recording catalogue has also reached new ears this year, with an estimated 40 million listens worldwide through radio broadcast, streaming and download.

Together, we've continued our mission to bring centuries-old traditions of historical performance to audiences in Ireland and abroad, developing connections across a range of excellent artistic and educational experiences.

Looking ahead, we are already preparing for an extraordinary milestone: our 30th anniversary in 2026! Ambitious plans are underway, including two special performances at London's iconic Wigmore Hall and our very first tour of the United States under Peter Whelan, spotlighting the astonishing voice of countertenor Hugh Cutting. Our landmark new recording of Handel's Messiah finally receives its release next year, and we look forward to celebrating this with you on April 10th at Dublin HandelFest.

None of this would be possible without you - our dedicated audience, partners, and friends. Your enthusiasm, applause, and unwavering support inspire us every day.

We also want to take a moment to acknowledge the principal funding that the Irish Baroque Orchestra receives from Arts Council Ireland, which is central to our ongoing sustainability and success. Culture Ireland has continued to partner with us in funding new levels of international ambition, and Dublin City Council has worked with us to open up more spaces for musical creativity and play for children in the heart of Dublin City. New partnerships with Trusts and Foundations and corporate entities have begun to develop in 2025, and we are grateful to every one of them for seeing the potential in our work and sharing our passion for it.

Thank you for joining us on this journey and for making the Irish Baroque Orchestra a vibrant part of Ireland's cultural landscape.

Wishing you a joyful festive season and a harmonious New Year!

With warmest wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Aliye Cornish Moore". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Aliye Cornish Moore
Chief Executive Officer
Irish Baroque Orchestra

Messiah is by far Handel's best-known oratorio, but also his least typical. Leaving aside a few early essays in the genre, all Handel's oratorios were composed from 1732 onwards. By this time he was already in his late forties and England's best-known composer, thanks in part to the patronage of the Hanoverian Kings George I and George II, whose family Handel had served in Germany. Handel turned to oratorio in earnest as a response to the increasing expense and difficulty of mounting Italian opera in London. The emergence of other companies meant that the effective monopoly on Italian opera that Handel had enjoyed for the best part of two decades, as impresario of the Royal Academy of Music, was now being challenged. And the success of John Gay's *Beggar's Opera* (1728), which poked fun at the conventions and contrivances of the form, suggested to Handel, ever alert to shifts in public taste, that the appetite for opera might be waning. The religious subject-matter of most of the oratorios and the absence of costumes and scenery also offered Handel a means of circumventing the ban on staged performances during Lent.

Most of Handel's English oratorios – works such as *Samson*, *Saul* and *Jephtha* – narrate a single linear story, divided into 'Acts' (rather than 'Parts'), with solo singers representing individual protagonists and the chorus representing groups such as 'Israelites' or 'Philistines'. None of these things is true of *Messiah*. Though the text is all taken from the Bible – mostly in the resonant phrases of the 'King James Version', published early in the seventeenth century – it does not focus on a single story, aside from a few consecutive numbers towards the end of Part One which relate the events of Christ's Nativity. No singer takes on a named role, and there is no sustained narrative thread. This does not mean that the selection of texts is in any way haphazard, though: on the contrary, the words are carefully selected from both Old and New Testaments to build up a compelling picture of Christ as the fulfilment of the Old Testament's prophecy and promise that a redeeming Messiah would live and die on Earth.

The unusual structure of *Messiah* and the distinctive approach it takes towards

conveying its religious message are in fact much less the work of Handel than of his librettist, Charles Jennens, a wealthy Leicestershire landowner, patron of the arts, and prominent 'non-juror' who believed that the English throne should have remained in the hands of the Stuart dynasty. Jennens was also a friend and great admirer of Handel – he called him 'the Prodigious' – and he had already given him one oratorio libretto for him (*Saul*, 1739) and contributed to the planning of another (*L'Allegro, Il Penseroso ed Il Moderato*, 1740). However, he embarked on the preparation of the *Messiah* libretto in 1739 without consulting Handel, sending it to him in July 1741 only when it was complete.

Handel famously composed the music in only twenty-four days in August and September 1741. His task was eased to an extent by the reuse of music already composed for other purposes, a habitual practice for him: 'For unto us a child is born' and 'All we like sheep have gone astray', for example, both make use of music originally composed for words in Italian, helping to explain their slightly awkward text-setting. Even allowing for such self-borrowing, however, Handel must have been working at a white-hot level of inspiration. The sometimes messy handwriting and frequent abbreviations found on the manuscript, now housed in the British Library, certainly suggest great speed. Jennens confided to friends that he felt Handel's haste had impaired the quality of the music, though he later amended this view.

At around this time, Handel received an unexpected invitation from William Cavendish, Duke of Devonshire and Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, to visit Dublin to present concerts that would lift public morale after a series of bad harvests and bitterly cold winters. Cavendish's proposal built on the solid reputation Handel's music already enjoyed in the Irish capital. John and William Neale – the latter of whom built the 'New Musick Hall' in Fishamble Street where *Messiah* was premiered – published arrangements of airs from Handel's operas as early as the mid-1720s, and from 1736 onwards his music featured in the Mercer's Hospital annual benefit concerts. Handel accepted the Duke's invitation with alacrity – unusually, he had planned no new productions for the

coming London season – and took with him the full score of *Messiah* that his assistant John Christopher Smith had prepared from his manuscript.

Handel's arrival in November 1741 generated immediate excitement, and within a month Neale's Music Hall, already attracting large audiences since opening that October, advertised a series of six concerts in which Handel would direct his own music. The first of these, which featured the 'pastoral ode' *L'Allegro, Il Penseroso ed Il Moderato* as well as several concertos, was described by the *Dublin Journal* as 'superior to any thing of the kind in the kingdom before'; subsequent programmes included *Acis and Galatea*, *Esther*, *Alexander's Feast* and *Ode for St Cecilia's Day*.

Keen to capitalise on his popularity in Dublin, Handel was impatient to unveil his as-yet-unperformed *Messiah*. He encountered some resistance from Jonathan Swift, Dean of St Patrick's Cathedral, but after protracted negotiations, choristers from both Dublin's cathedrals were permitted to take part in the first performance. Further delays were caused by the illness of Susannah Cibber, the well-known actress and singer for whom Handel had written the mezzo-soprano arias, who had moved to Dublin in 1740 – in part to escape the publicity surrounding the scandalous breakdown of her marriage. The premiere eventually took place on 13 April 1742 and was given 'for Relief of the Prisoners in the several Gaols, and for the Support of Mercer's Hospital in Stephen's Street, and of the Charitable Infirmary on the Inns Quay'. The well-known Dublin violinist Matthew Dubourg led an orchestra that regularly played for military ceremonies and thus included the trumpets and timpani required by Handel. The response from the 700-strong audience was rapturous, prompting Handel to organise a further performance on 3 June.

The work that was heard by those first two Dublin audiences differed in several respects both from the version presented at the Theatre Royal in Covent Garden on 23 March 1743 and from those generally heard since. Dubourg's ensemble did not include the oboes that Handel subsequently

added to the Messiah orchestra. And the Fishamble Street performances featured eight or nine soloists, rather than the four familiar today, offering Handel the opportunity to deploy a wider range of vocal timbres in the arias and recitatives. In Dublin 'How beautiful are the feet' was sung as a duet by two altos (counter-tenors in today's performance), culminating in the choral 'Break forth into joy', rather than as the self-contained solo movement more familiar today. The bass aria 'Why do the nations' was sung by a different singer from the baritone who sang the other low-voice sections, and the oratorio's final aria, 'If God be for us', was taken by a mezzo-soprano (rather than the soprano to whom Handel allotted it in later versions). By restoring these features of the premiere in the version they perform today, the Irish Baroque Orchestra not only offers audiences the rare opportunity to hear the same Messiah as their 1742 counterparts, but also casts some of Handel's best-loved music in a new and revealing light.

Michael J. Downes, 2025

MESSIAH

Part I

Sinfonia

Comfort Ye - Recitative, accompanied (tenor)

Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned. The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness: prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Ev'ry valley - Aria (tenor)

Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill made low, the crooked straight, and the rough places plain.

And the glory of the Lord - Chorus

And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed. And all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

Thus saith the Lord of Hosts - Recitative, accompanied (bass)

Thus saith the Lord of Hosts: Yet once, a little while, and I will shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land, and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come.

The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the Covenant, whom ye delight in; behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts.

But who may abide the day of his coming? - Aria (bass)

But who may abide the day of his coming, and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire.

And he shall purify - Chorus

And he shall purify the sons of Levi, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.

Behold, a virgin shall conceive - Recitative (countertenor)
Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name
Emmanuel. 'God with us.'

○ thou that tellest - Aria (countertenor) and Chorus
○ thou that tellest good tidings to Zion, get thee up into the high mountain.
○ thou that tellest good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up thy voice with strength;
lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God. ○ thou
that tellest good tidings to Zion, arise, shine for thy light is come. And the
glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.

For behold, darkness shall cover the earth - Recitative, accompanied (bass)
For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people:
but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And
the gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.

The people that walked in darkness - Aria (bass)
The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light. And they that
dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.

For unto us a Child is born - Chorus
For unto us a child is born, unto us, a Son is given, and the government shall
be upon his shoulder, and his Name shall be called: Wonderful, Counsellor,
The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace!

Pifa

There were shepherds abiding in the field - Recitative (soprano)
There were shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by
night.
And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them and the glory of the Lord
shone round about them and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto
them: Fear not; for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall

be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying:

Glory to God in the highest - Chorus

Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth, good will toward men!

Rejoice Greatly - Aria (soprano)

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion, shout, O daughter of Jerusalem, behold, thy King cometh unto thee. He is the righteous Saviour, and he shall speak peace unto the heathen.

Then shall the eyes of the blind be open'd - Recitative (mezzo-soprano)

Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing.

He shall feed his flock like a shepherd -Aria (mezzo-soprano)

He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: and he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young. Come unto him, all ye that labour, come unto him, that are heavy laden, and he will give you rest. Take his yoke upon you, and learn of him; for he is meek and lowly of heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

His yoke is easy - Chorus

His yoke is easy, and his burthen is light.

****INTERVAL (20 minutes)****

Part II

Behold the Lamb of God - Chorus

Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world.

He was despised and rejected - Aria (Mezzo-Soprano)

He was despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. He gave his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: he hid not his face from shame and spitting.

Surely, he hath borne our griefs - Chorus

Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him.

And with his stripes we are healed - Chorus

And with his stripes we are healed.

All we, like sheep, have gone astray - Chorus

All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

All they that see him, laugh him to scorn - Recitative, accompanied (tenor)

All they that see him, laugh him to scorn: they shoot out their lips, and shake their heads, saying:

He trusted in God that he would deliver him - Chorus

He trusted in God that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, if he delight in him.

Thy rebuke hath broken his heart - Recitative, accompanied (soprano)

Thy rebuke hath broken his heart; he is full of heaviness; he looked for some to have pity on him, but there was no man, neither found he any to comfort him.

Behold, and see if there be any sorrow - Aria (soprano)

Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto his sorrow!

He was cut off out of the land of the living - Recitative, accompanied (tenor)
He was cut off out the land of the living; for the transgressions of thy people was he stricken.

But Thou didst not leave His soul in hell - Aira (tenor)
But thou didst not leave his soul in hell; nor didst thou suffer thy Holy One to see corruption.

Lift up your heads, O ye gates - Chorus
Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in!
Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle.
Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in!
Who is this King of Glory? The Lord of Hosts, he is the King of Glory.

Unto Which of the Angels - Recitative (tenor)
Unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten Thee?

Let all the angels of God - Chorus
Let all the angels of God worship him.

Thou art gone up on high - Aria (countertenor)
Thou art gone up on high, thou hast led captivity captive, and received gifts for men, yea, even for thine enemies, that the Lord God might dwell among them.

The Lord gave the word - Chorus
The Lord gave the word: great was the company of the preachers.

How beautiful are the feet - Duet (Countertenors) & Chorus
How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things.

Why do the nations so furiously rage together? - Aria (bass)

Why do the nations so furiously rage together, and why do the people imagine a vain thing; the kings of the earth rise up, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord, and against his anointed.

Let us break their bonds asunder - Chorus

Let us break their bonds asunder, and cast away their yokes from us.

He that dwelleth in heaven - Recitative (tenor)

He that dwelleth in heaven shall laugh them to scorn; the Lord shall have them in derision.

Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron - Recit (tenor)

Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.

Hallelujah - Chorus

Hallelujah, for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth, Hallelujah!

The Kingdom of this world is become the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever, Hallelujah!

King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, and he shall reign for ever and ever, Hallelujah!

Part III

I know that my redeemer liveth - Aria (soprano)

I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.

For now is Christ risen from the dead, the first fruits of them that sleep.

Since by man came death - Chorus

Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

Behold I tell you a mystery - Recitative (bass)

Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.

The trumpet shall sound - Aria (bass)

The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

Then shall be brought to pass- Recitative (countertenor)

Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written; Death is swallow'd up in victory.

○ death, where is thy sting? - Duet (countertenor & tenor)

○ death, where is thy sting? ○ grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law.

But thanks be to God - Chorus

But thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

If God be for us - Aria (mezzo-soprano)

If God be for us, who can be against us? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?

It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is at the right hand of God, who makes intercession for us.

Worthy is The Lamb - Chorus

Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, and hath redeemed us to God by his blood, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.

Amen - Chorus

Blessing, and honour, glory, and power be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.

DIRECTOR Peter Whelan

IRISH BAROQUE CHOIR

Soprano Mary Bevan*, Charlotte O'Hare, Sarah Keating
Alto Jess Dandy*, Alexander Chance*, Nathan Mercieca*
Tenor Anthony Gregory*, Christopher Bowen, Stuart Kinsella
Bass Sean Boylan*, William Gaunt*, Jack Comerford
*Soloist

IRISH BAROQUE ORCHESTRA

Violin 1 Louis C'reach, Claire Duff, Marja Gaynor, Estella Fischer*
Violin 2 Alice Earll, Anita Vedres, Jenna Raggett, Claire O'Sullivan*
Viola Pablo de Pedro Cano, Tadhg Sudlow, Paulo Alonso* (Wexford only),
Eve Quigley* (Dublin only)
Cello Sarah McMahon, Carina Drury, Nuría Viscaino*
Bass Malachy Robinson
Organ Malcolm Proud
Bassoon Philip Turbett
Trumpet 1 Darren Moore
Trumpet 2 Michael Harrison
Timpani Brian Dungan
* = IBO Apprentice

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Praised by Opera for her “dramatic wit and vocal control” in stand-out performances of Baroque, Classical and contemporary repertoire, **Mary Bevan** appears regularly with leading orchestras and ensembles worldwide.

During the 2025/26 season, Bevan makes her debut with the Dutch National Opera as Neola in a new Michel van der Aa commission entitled *Theory of Flames*, sings the role of Pat Nixon in John Adams’s *Nixon in China* conducted by the composer in Rome, returns to the Semperoper Dresden as Michal in Handel’s *Saul*, and appears in concert as Almirena in *Rinaldo* on tour with the English Concert (Harry Bicket) and as Galatea in *Acis and Galatea* with the Early Opera Company (Christian Curnyn). Other concert plans include Handel’s *Messiah* with the Gabrieli Consort (Paul McCreesh), Bach’s *Mass in B Minor* with the Netherlands Bach Choir (Richard Egarr), John Adams’s *Le Livre de Baudelaire* with The Hallé (John Adams), Mahler’s *Symphony No. 4* with the Aurora Orchestra (Nicholas Collon) and a return to Wigmore Hall for a solo evening recital.

In recent seasons Bevan has sung the title role of *La Calisto* with the Bayerische Staatsoper, *La Folie in Platée* for the Opernhaus Zurich, *Cleopatra* in *Giulio Cesare* and *Morgana* in *Alcina* with Teatro dell’Opera di Roma, *Morgana* with the Royal Ballet and Opera, *Eurydice* in *Orfeo ed Eurydice* for Teatro La Fenice, *Dalinda* in *Ariodante* at the Bolshoi Theatre, *Rose Maurrant* in Weill’s *Street Scene* for the Opera de Monte Carlo and Teatro Real Madrid, and *Bellezza* in *Il Trionfo del tempo e del desinganno* and *Marzelline* in *Fidelio* for the Royal Danish Opera. Her many roles for the English National Opera include *Susanna* in *Le nozze di Figaro*, *Eurydice* in *Orpheus in the Underworld*, *Zerlina* in *Don Giovanni*, *Yum-Yum* in *The Mikado* and *Despina* in *Così fan Tutte*. Elsewhere, Bevan has sung the title roles of Rossi’s *Orpheus* at the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse and of Turnage’s *Coraline* at the Barbican, and appeared as *Lila* in David Bruce’s *The Firework-Maker’s Daughter*.

Bevan’s many recent concert appearances have included her Carnegie Hall debut as *Dalinda* with the English Concert, *Creation* at the Barbican with the

Academy of Ancient Music, Sally Beamish's *The Judas Passion* with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, and her return to the 2022 BBC Proms with Bach's *Mass in B Minor*. Bevan has toured extensively across Europe, Australia, Asia and the US with the Kammerorchester Basel, Australian Chamber Orchestra and English Concert (Harry Bicket), and has performed numerous world premieres, including Sir James MacMillan's *Christmas Oratorio* at the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, A. Bliss's *Rout* with the London Philharmonic Orchestra and Roxanna Panufnik's *Faithful Journey* with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra. She has also sung with the Handel and Haydn Society Boston, Philharmonia Baroque, and the BBC Symphony and BBC Concert orchestras, and appears regularly in recital at Wigmore Hall.

Bevan's wide-ranging discography includes numerous releases on Signum Records and her most recent, *Elegy*, is for release in October 2025; also for the label are a recording of orchestral French song entitled *Visions Illuminées*, art song albums *Voyages* and *Divine Muse* with pianist Joseph Middleton, Handel's *Queens*, and *A Most Marvellous Party* featuring the music of Noël Coward with tenor Nicky Spence. Other albums include Handel's *The Triumph of Time and Truth* and *Ode for St Cecilia's Day*, Vaughan Williams's *Symphony No.3* and Schubert's *Rosamunde* with the BBC Philharmonic, Arthur Sullivan songs (Chandos), Vaughan Williams folk songs (Albion), and Brahms's *Liebesliederwaltzer* (Resonus).

Bevan is a winner of the Royal Philharmonic Society's Young Artist award and UK Critics' Circle Award for Exceptional Young Talent in music. She was awarded an MBE in the Queen's birthday honours list in 2019 and was made a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Music in 2025.

Cumbrian born **Jess Dandy** is widely regarded as the foremost British contralto of her generation and has been praised for her velvety plangent timbre, and her artistic remarkable immediacy. She studied Modern and Medieval Languages at Trinity College, Cambridge, and trained at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, where she is now a Fellow.

In the 2025/26 season, Jess makes house debuts at the Salzburg Easter Festival as Floßhilde in *Das Rheingold*, at the Bayerische Staatsoper as Lady Toodle in *Die Englische Katze*, and later in the summer at The Grange Festival. On the concert platform, she appears in performances of *The Dream of Gerontius* with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra/Kazuki Yamada and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic/Andrew Manze, *Elgar's Sea Pictures* with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra/Antony Hermus and *Handel's Messiah* with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment/Eamonn Dougan, the Irish Baroque Orchestra/Peter Whelan and the Tampere Philharmonic/Matthew Halls.

Recent highlights include her return to the BBC Proms for Stravinsky's *Requiem Canticles*, Thomas Adès's *Totentanz* with the Leipzig Gewandhausorchester/Thomas Adès, Berlioz's *Roméo et Juliette* with the Bergen Philharmonic/Sir Mark Elder, Mahler's *Symphony No. 3* with the BBC Philharmonic/John Storgårds, Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9* with the Boston Symphony/Ludovic Morlot, *Handel's Messiah* with the Tampere Philharmonic/Matthew Halls, and Mahler's *Rückert-Lieder* with the BBC Symphony Orchestra/Kristian Sallinen, among others.

Jess finds a natural habitat on the recital platform and enjoys working with a wide range of distinguished pianists, including Martin Roscoe, Dylan Perez, Malcolm Martineau, Chris Glynn, James Baillieu, Julius Drake, Gary Matthewman, Keval Shah, Ian Tindale, Sholto Kynoch, Anthony Hewitt, Gavin Roberts, Iain Burnside, Simon Lepper, Huw Watkins and Wolfram Rieger.

Recent recital highlights include her return to the Oxford International Song

Festival with Keval Shah for the programme Eternity in an Hour, a recital at Wigmore Hall with Dylan Perez, and a performance at the University of York with Ben Goldscheider, Fenella Humphreys, and Martin Roscoe, among others.

In 2021, Jess was shortlisted for a Royal Philharmonic Society Award in the category of Young Artist. She is a multi-faceted artist with a keen interest in ecology, body psychology and spirituality. She is the co-founder of SongPath, a mental health initiative creating musical walking trails in nature for better mental health. With composer Alex Mills, she developed the Music & Being Collective, an open laboratory space exploring music and our sense of self through interdisciplinary dialogue.

Alexander Chance was born in London in 1992, and educated at New College, Oxford, where he was a Choral Scholar and read Classics.

He regularly works with many of the leading conductors in the early music world, including Sir John Eliot Gardiner, Masaaki Suzuki, René Jacobs, Masato Suzuki, Harry Bicket, Laurence Cummings, Jonathan Cohen, John Butt, Kristian Bezuidenhout, Marcus Creed, David Bates and Lionel Meunier. He is in demand as a concert soloist and has given many recitals around Europe, making his recital debut at the Wigmore Hall and Concertgebouw Amsterdam in 2024.

His debut recording, Drop not, mine eyes with lutenist Toby Carr, was named one of Gramophone Magazine's Best albums of 2023. His recent opera roles include Oberon (A Midsummer Night's Dream, Britten) for The Grange Festival; Apollo (Death in Venice, Britten) for Welsh National Opera; and Tolomeo (Giulio Cesare, Handel) for English Touring Opera.

Recent and future highlights include his debut appearance at the BBC Proms, regular appearances at Wigmore Hall with the London Handel Players, Fretwork, Arcangelo and other groups, solo recitals with the English Concert, Freiburger Barockorchester and Dunedin Consort, and Andronico / Tamerlano at the International Handel Festival in Karlsruhe.

In 2022, he became the first countertenor to win the International Handel Singing Competition, also winning the Audience Prize.

Current and recent operatic/stage work for **Nathan Mercieca** includes Athamas in Handel Semele at Waterperry Opera Festival and Opera Holland Park; Amos Gitai's multimedia verbatim play House at the Barbican Theatre, Berliner Festspiele, Teatro di Roma, and Teatros de Canal Madrid; and St. Catherine in Anna Rose Prynne/Tom Floyd The Blue Margin for Outland Opera. A keen exponent of contemporary opera, he has created several roles, including CJ in Warboy & Stewart Fierce Love (Tête-à-Tête), Daryl/the Devil in Muelas+Ward A&E (Tête-à-Tête), and all the male roles in Clare Elton/Lila Palmer These Wondering Stones (Barbican Centre). Previously he has appeared as "JL" in John Ramster's staging of Handel Messiah (Merry Opera), Xerse in Cavalli Xerse (Grimeborn Festival), and Sorceress/Spirit in Purcell Dido and Aeneas (English Music Festival). For the Royal Opera he covered Peisander in Monteverdi The Return of Ulysses and workshopped the role of Yoël in Na'ama Zisser Mamzer/Bastard.

As an oratorio soloist he has recently appeared with the Irish Baroque Orchestra and Peter Whelan in Bach "Mass in B minor" in Dublin and Galway, and in Handel Messiah at the Wigmore Hall, which he also recorded for Linn Records. A regular collaborator with Solomon's Knot, he has appeared with them at Wigmore Hall, the Aldeburgh Festival, the London Handel Festival, the Festival Bach Montréal, the London International Festival of Early Music, the Thüringer Bachwochen, de Singel Antwerp, the Concertgebouw Bruges, Stoller Hall, and the National Centre for Early Music. He has previously appeared as a soloist with the Hanover Band, Amici Voices, Wondr'ous Machine, and Festival Voices, at venues including St John's Smith Square, West Road Concert Hall, and the London Handel Festival.

Hailed by The Sunday Times' Hugh Canning as the "Mozart tenor to watch," **Anthony Gregory** is admired for his unique timbre, stage presence, and musicality. A former Jerwood Young Artist at Glyndebourne and alumnus of both the National Opera Studio and the Royal College of Music, Gregory was named one of opera's future stars by esteemed critic Rupert Christiansen and won the 2015 Breakthrough Artist Award at the WhatsOnStage Opera Poll following his standout performance as Peter Quint in *The Turn of the Screw*. His successes include appearances with Glyndebourne Festival, Royal Ballet and Opera, English National Opera, Festival de Aix-en-Provence, Teatro Real in Madrid, Bergen Opera, Opernhaus Zürich, Scottish Opera, and Norwegian National Opera in Oslo.

In the 2025–26 season, Gregory makes several debuts including his anticipated return to Opernhaus Zürich in a new production of *Glaucus et Scylla* in his role debut in the title role under the baton of Emmanuelle Haïm, his company debut with Santa Fe Opera as Grimoaldo in *Rodelinda*. On the concert platform he performs *Glaucus et Scylla* with Concert d'Astrée, tenor soloist in Bach's *Mass in B Minor* and Handel's *Messiah* with the Irish Baroque Orchestra; he joins The English Concert and Harry Bicket in concert at Wigmore Hall and Handel's *Messiah* with Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra.

During the 2024–25 season, Gregory made a series of exciting role and company debuts: as Achilles in *Iphigénie en Aulide* at Greek National Opera, Oronte in *Alcina* at Opera di Roma, and the title role in *Mitridate, Re di Ponto* in a return to Staatsoper Hamburg. Other highlights include his return to the role of Flute in Laurent Pelly's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at Opéra de Lausanne and joining the Scottish Chamber Orchestra under the baton of Maxim Emelyanychev for a performance of Haydn's *Nelson Mass*.

With a voice described as ‘rich and sonorous’, Irish baritone **Seán Boylan** is one of the most exciting emerging talents of today. Seán is a graduate of the Guildhall School of Music and Drama where he received his master’s degree (Distinction) and the Royal Irish Academy of Music, Dublin.

In the 2025-26 season, Seán returns to Opera North in his role debut as Schaunard in *La bohème*, conducted by Garry Walker and Catriona Beveridge. He also sings the role of Algernon Moncrieff in *The Importance of Being Earnest* for Garsington under Douglas Boyd. On the concert platform, he joins National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland conducted by David Brophy for a concert celebrating the presidency of Michael D Higgins, and his wife Sabina.

Last season, Seán reprised the role of Alcandro in *L’Olimpiade* with the Irish Baroque Orchestra and Irish National Opera in his Italian debut at the Teatro Tino di Lorenzo in Noto, Sicily. He also returned to Irish National Opera to sing the roles of Marullo in *Rigoletto* and Frank in *Die Fledermaus* for performances in Dublin, and on a nationwide Irish tour, respectively. In concert, Seán made two appearances with the National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland, firstly as the baritone soloist in the Irish premiere of James MacMillan *St. John Passion* with conductor David Hill, followed by a solo recital of operatic arias with Luis Toro Araya. He completed the season by joining Opera North at the Nevill Holt Festival for *Guglielmo* in *Così fan tutte*.

Other recent operatic roles include Alcandro in *L’Olimpiade* with Irish National Opera and the Irish Baroque Orchestra conducted by Peter Whelan in Ireland, at the Royal Ballet & Opera, Covent Garden, and in Switzerland at the Nouvel Opéra Fribourg; *Guglielmo* in *Così fan tutte* at Garsington Opera; Tarquinius in *The Rape of Lucretia* at Potsdam Winteroper; *Moralès* in *Carmen* with Irish National Opera; the title role in *Don Giovanni* at Nevill Holt Opera and Pluto/Aristaeus (cover) Orpheus in the Underworld at English National Opera.

As a member of the Alvarez Young Artist Programme at Garsington Opera in 2019 he covered the title role of *Don Giovanni*, for which he was awarded the

Helen Clark Award for his performance of the role at short notice. Other operatic roles include Notaio in Gianni Schicchi (London Schools Symphony Orchestra at Barbican Hall); Novice's Friend in Billy Budd (St. Endellion Festival); Silvio Pagliacci, Frank in Die Fledermaus, Dandini in La Cenerentola, and the title role in Ambroise Thomas' Hamlet (Guildhall School of Music & Drama).

In recital, Seán has performed at Song in the City; LSO St Luke's; Hugh Lane Gallery in Dublin, Clifden Arts Festival in Galway and Rosemary Street, Belfast. He has also performed in concert with the Cambridge Philharmonic, Ulster Orchestra, Galway Cathedral, Dublin's National Concert Hall, the Drogheda Classical Music Series, and a live broadcast with Irish National Opera and mezzo-soprano Paula Murrihy in Kilkenny Castle, Ireland. He has collaborated with pianist Iain Burnside on "Drums & Guns", a project commemorating the centenary of World War I and the Dublin Easter 1916 Rising, which was performed in Dublin, London and New York City (Lincoln Center). In theatre, previous productions include Pygmalion and Grania for the Abbey Theatre and Hand Me Down the Moon for the Dublin Fringe Festival.

Seán has participated in masterclasses with Dame Ann Murray (in the Irish Culture in Britain series at Wigmore Hall); Elly Ameling, Robert Holl, Roger Vignoles and Julius Drake (all at the Franz Schubert Institut in Baden bei Wien) and with Graham Johnson as part of the Song Guild at Guildhall School of Music and Drama. Seán was also a semi-finalist in the 42nd International Hans Gabor Belvedere Competition (2024) in Jurmala, Latvia.

Seán studied piano, organ and voice at the Royal Irish Academy of Music (where his singing teacher was Virginia Kerr), receiving many regional and national prizes before focusing his studies on singing. He has been invited to perform for several presidents of Ireland, HM King Charles III and at festivals across Ireland, the United Kingdom and Europe. At the Guildhall School of Music and Drama he was a Guildhall School Scholar and a Gwen Catley Scholar, supported by the Amar-Frances & Foster-Jenkins Trust, and studied with Robert Dean. He was the winner of the NI Opera Festival of Voice 2014.

Olivier Award winner, **Peter Whelan**, is among the most dynamic and versatile exponents of historical performance of his generation. He is Artistic Director of Irish Baroque Orchestra and Curator for Early Music of Norwegian Wind Ensemble. He becomes Music Director of Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra from the 2026/27 season and is Music Director Designate in 2025/26.

As a conductor, Peter has a particular passion for exploring and championing neglected music from the Baroque and Classical eras. Recent engagements have included appearances with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Beethoven Orchester Bonn, Netherlands Chamber Orchestra, Royal Northern Sinfonia, Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana, Kristiansand Symphony Orchestra, Lahti Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, The English Concert, Dunedin Consort, Monteverdi Choir and English Baroque Soloists, Gluck Orfeo with San Francisco Opera, Vivaldi l'Olimpiade with Irish National Opera (across Ireland and the Royal Opera House, London) and Rodelinda at Garsington Opera.

Highlights of the 2025/26 season include an appearance at the BBC Proms with the Irish Baroque Orchestra and return visits to Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Meininger Hofkapelle, National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland, Tapiola Sinfonietta and Monteverdi Choir and English Baroque Soloists. Peter's artistic direction in live performance and the recording studio has been widely praised for its "rich insight, style and charisma" (Guardian), its "stylish verve" (BBC Music Magazine), and "energetic yet unfailingly sensitive direction" (Gramophone).

As a champion of early music and opera, Peter represents "the very best of contemporary trends in bringing this music to life: flex and zest with tempi, lithe and vigorous ... an incredible alertness to colors and moods summoned by the cut-and-thrust harmonic footwork of this music" (Operawire).

The Oliver Award-winning **Irish Baroque Orchestra** is acclaimed as Ireland's flagship period music ensemble and delivers world-class historically-informed performances across Ireland and abroad. Under the artistic direction of Peter Whelan, scholarship and musical excellence converge in a unique way through the IBO's work, creating an original offering like no other organisation on the Irish classical music scene. The founding of the **Irish Baroque Choir** in 2023 has deepened the ensemble's artistic identity, with high-profile collaborations including the BBC Proms in 2025.

As an ambassador for the stories of Ireland's musical past, the IBO uses its unique perspective to develop the growing store of knowledge surrounding the very early days of Baroque and Classical music in Ireland. The IBO's research, recordings and performances offer audiences across Ireland a new opportunity to reevaluate and reclaim their cultural heritage, while also engaging the Irish diaspora through the increasing global reach of this work. Even Handel's Messiah - an annual touring highlight in the IBO calendar - is a rekindled link to Dublin's cultural life in 1742.

Celebrating 30 years in the 2025/2026 season, the IBO's programme includes a tour to the USA, a return to London's Wigmore Hall and the long-awaited release of a new recording on Linn Records, bringing Handel's 'Messiah' to audiences with all the hallmarks of the IBO's approach under Peter Whelan.

Storytelling sits at the heart of the IBO's Irish heritage recording cycle on Linn Records, which spotlights the interesting characters and extraordinary music from an Ireland of old. This cycle includes 'Welcome Home Mr Dubourg' (2019), 'The Trials of Tendu' with Tara Erraught (2021), 'The Hibernian Muse' with Sestina (2022), 'Mr Charles the Hungarian' (2023) and 'Rachel Baptist - Ireland's Black Syren' (2024). A warm critical response to these recordings internationally has marked out the IBO's distinctive voice on the world stage. Future recordings include an ambitious reconstruction of Handel's 1742 'Dublin' Messiah (2026)

In February 2022 the IBO made its debut to critical acclaim at the Linbury Theatre, Royal Opera House, London with Vivaldi's 'Bajazet', a co-production from Irish National Opera and the Royal Opera House. The excellence of their work on 'Bajazet', with artistic director Peter Whelan, was recognised in April 2022 with an Olivier Award for 'Outstanding Achievement in Opera'.

In recent seasons the IBO has made high-profile debuts at the BBC Proms, the Edinburgh International Festival, the MA Festival Bruges and Summer at Snape. In Ireland, the IBO continues to work in partnership with a number of organisations, to bring excellent artistic experiences to audiences around the country. In 2025/2026 these include the Blackwater Valley Opera Festival, the Office of Public Works and University Concert Hall, Limerick.

The IBO is committed to developing the national scene for historically-informed performance and works with a number of partner organisations across Ireland to ensure its continued growth for future generations. The award-winning Irish Youth Baroque Orchestra (delivered in partnership with the Irish Association of Youth Orchestras) gives students the opportunity to work intensively on elements of period style under the guidance of director Claire Duff. IBO's Apprentice programme supports students as they take their first steps into the profession, with several alumnae now working with the IBO as active professional musicians.

The Irish Baroque Orchestra is generously funded by the Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon. It also receives financial support from Culture Ireland to support an expanding international profile, and Dublin City Council for Dublin HandelFest. The orchestra has its own collection of period instruments, purchased with the assistance of an Arts Council capital grant and the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. The IBO is resident at the National Concert Hall, Dublin and as of 2021 is an ensemble and Board member of the Réseau Européen de Musique Ancienne (European Early Music Network).

Our community of supporters occupies the heart of the IBO, and plays a significant role in helping us to realise our ambitions. Thank you!

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Our Friends and Patrons form a community of support that lies at the heart of our organisation, while enjoying a closer relationship with the orchestra. Packages start from €50 per year (just over €4 per month) and come with a range of special privileges such as Priority Booking, regular office coffee mornings, VIP seating and invitations to special events.

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BACH: CHRISTMAS ORATORIO BWV 248

Irish Baroque Orchestra and Choir
Peter Whelan, director

December 12th, 7.30pm
St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin
December 13th, 7.30pm
Kilkenny Castle, Kilkenny

Anna Dennis, soprano
Aisling Kenny, soprano
Rebecca Leggett, mezzo-soprano
Laura Lamph, mezzo-soprano
Jonathan Hanley, tenor
Ruari Bowen, tenor
Frederick Long, bass-baritone
William Gaunt, bass

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