



Messiah At The Foundling Hospital

More than 250 years since its composition Handel's *Messiah* remains one of the most popular choral pieces in western music. It's been recorded hundreds of times, is performed across the globe by amateurs and professionals alike, and it contains a tune that is as instantly recognisable as any in music, the *Hallelujah Chorus*. Yet few people know the heart-rending story of how this much-loved work first came to public attention or the role it played in helping save the lives of tens of thousands of children. Historian Amanda Vickery and BBC Radio 3 presenter Tom Service present this one-hour documentary which re-creates the premiere of *Messiah* in 1750 and tells the story of how this masterpiece heralded a golden age of philanthropy.

The first Foundling Hospital performance of the *Messiah* took place on 1 May 1750 as a fundraiser for the venue. This was the first ever secular charity benefit concert in which art and philanthropy came together to raise money from the haves for the have-nots. It launched a tradition that every fundraising concert has followed since. *Messiah at the Foundling Hospital* will lift the lid on 18th century London and explore the events that led Handel to stage his choral masterpiece at Thomas Coram's visionary children's institution on that historic night.

Exploring historical documents and artefacts from the Foundling Hospital, Amanda Vickery will unearth the appalling problem of rampant infant mortality in London which forced mothers to abandon their babies at the Hospital. Tom Service will examine the momentous trials and tribulations faced by the impresario Handel in London, the capricious attitudes of audiences of the time, and discover how Handel became involved with the Foundling Hospital alongside another visionary philanthropist of the day, the artist William Hogarth.

Running through the film will be moments from that historic performance of Handel's Messiah, meticulously recreated as it would have been in the chapel of the Foundling Hospital in 1750. Evocative scenes of period drama reconstructed using original texts will help illustrate the dramatic story. This powerful mix of music, documentary and period drama will reveal the story of the dawn of a golden age of philanthropy which lives on to this day, and unveil the surprising and emotional backdrop to the birth of Handel's greatest masterpiece.

Messiah at the Foundling Hospital is presented by Amanda Vickery and Tom Service. The re-creation of Messiah in 1750 is performed by the Gabrieli Consort and Players with Trinity Boys' Choir conducted by Paul McCreesh as Handel. Thomas Coram is played by Paul Moriarty, William Hogarth by Christopher Staines and Lady Somerset by Francesca Bailey. The film is produced and directed by Robert Coldstream.

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A Reef Television production for BBC Two

Executive Producers: Ben Weston, Liz Hartford, Richard Farnbrough

Producer/Director: Robert Coldstream

Music Producer: Caroline Page

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