



Zamir Chorale of Boston presents Open Sing of Judas Maccabaeus and Chichester Psalms

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OPEN SING

The Zamir Chorale of Boston will present an Open Sing of Handel's oratorio *JUDAS MACCABAEUS* and Leonard Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms*, featuring boy Soprano Frederick Metzger; and Joshua R. Jacobson, conductor. The Sing will take place **Sunday, December 2, 2007, at 3 pm**, at [Temple Reyim, 1860 Washington Street, Newton, MA.](#) (Please click here for directions.) Admission is \$10; \$8 for students and seniors. Vocal scores, included in the cost of admission, will be available at the door. Please join us either as a singer or as a listener; for further information, call 617-244-6333.

Program notes by Professor Joshua Jacobson

JUDAS MACCABAEUS

George Fridric Handel (1685-1759) is best known to the general public today as a composer of oratorios. But the German composer originally established his reputation as a composer of Italian opera, first in Rome and later in London.

During the 1730s Handel realized that his operatic style was losing popularity among London audiences. He therefore turned to a new type of composition - the oratorio in English - which could be produced at less expense (no sets or costumes were required), and which could be enjoyed by those who had never felt comfortable with the aristocratic entertainment of Italian opera.

Following the examples of the earlier oratorios, Handel's works are essentially operatic in style, and based on Old Testament stories. Handel broke from his predecessors, however, in his preference for the English language and his dramatic use of the chorus, setting it on an equal footing with the solo roles. Handel's oratorios thus succeeded in portraying the drama of great Biblical stories to Londoners in a language they could understand.

In the summer of 1746, Handel began to compose what would eventually become one of his most-loved works, and one of the most steadily performed oratorios in the repertoire: *Judas Maccabaeus*. The work saw its premiere in

1747.

While the story of *Judas Maccabaeus* is based on the exploits of the ancient Judean freedom-fighter, to the British public the work also stood as a metaphor of their own national aspirations. In April of 1746 the British army had finally succeeded in ridding the country of a foreign invasion by the Stuarts. In fact, the oratorio was composed specifically to celebrate the British army's triumphal return to London.

But to London's Jewish population, the work was to be taken literally; *Judas Maccabaeus* was a celebration of Chanukah, commemorating the Jewish revolt in 165 b.c.e to free Israel of the Syrian-Hellenistic invasion. The immense popularity of this oratorio among the Jews is due in large part to the fact that was the first important stage production in England to portray a Jewish national hero in an entirely favorable light. Indeed, Jews in eighteenth-century London were in great part responsible for the popular success of this work, and for the financial success of its composer.

Chichester Psalms

Chichester Psalms was the product of Leonard Bernstein's 1965 sabbatical from conducting the New York Philharmonic. Commissioned by the music festival in Chichester, England, Bernstein decided to set the Biblical Psalms in their original Hebrew. After experimenting with many contemporary idioms, the composer eventually returned to a style not so different from that of the musical he had composed ten years earlier, *West Side Story*. This music runs the gamut from the exuberant celebration of the first movement, to the theatrical confrontation of violence with lyricism in the second, to serene acceptance and humility in the third movement. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms* had become one of the most frequently performed works for chorus and orchestra.

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Zamir is in residence at **Hebrew College**.