

## Topic Page: [Handel, George Frideric, 1685–1759](https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/handel_george_1685_1759)

Summary Article: **Handel, George Frideric**

From *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

(hă'n'dəI), 1685–1759, English composer, b. Halle, Germany. Handel was one of the greatest masters of baroque music, most widely celebrated for his majestic oratorio *Messiah*. Of German descent, he was originally named Georg Friedrich Handel.

Son of a barber-surgeon, he early displayed musical talent and was sent to Friedrich Zachow, an organist and composer at Halle, for three years of training. After studying law at the Univ. of Halle (1703), he joined the opera orchestra at Hamburg. There his first two operas, *Almira* and *Nero*, were produced in 1705. The following four years were spent in Italy, where his operas *Rodrigo* (1707?) and *Agrippina* (1709) were staged, the latter very successfully. In Italy he met Alessandro Scarlatti and other masters and absorbed the Italian style and forms.

In 1710 Handel became musical director to the elector of Hanover but obtained leave to visit England in 1711, when his *Rinaldo* was produced in London. He returned to England in 1712 and took up permanent residence there. His employer, the elector, became George I of England in 1714. It was for the king that Handel composed his celebrated orchestral *Water Music* (1717).

In 1719 an opera company, the Royal Academy of Music, was formed under the musical direction of Handel, Attilio Ariosti, and Giovanni Battista Bononcini, all of whom composed operas for it. The company was dissolved in 1728, but Handel continued trying to present Italian opera in London until 1741, when his last opera, *Deidamia*, failed. Handel's 46 operas include much of his finest music; among them are *Julius Caesar* (1724), *Atalanta* (1736), *Berenice* (1737), and *Seise* (1738), which contains the tenor aria now known as *Largo*.

Handel's *Messiah* was presented in Dublin in 1742. An essentially contemplative work, it stands apart from the rest of his 32 oratorios, which are dramatically conceived, and its immense popularity has resulted in the erroneous conception of Handel as primarily a church composer. Other outstanding oratorios are *Acis and Galatea* (1720), *Esther* (1732), *Israel in Egypt* (1736–37), *Saul* (1739), and *Judas Maccabeus* (1747).

He also composed about 100 Italian solo cantatas; numerous orchestral works, including the Twelve Grand Concertos, Op. 6 (1739); two books of harpsichord suites (1720, 1733); three sets of six organ concertos (1738, 1743, 1760, the last published posthumously); and the anthem "Zadok, the Priest" (1727) for the coronation of George II, which has been used for all subsequent coronations. While composer to the duke of Chandos (1715–19), he wrote the 11 Chandos Anthems.

Handel's sight became impaired in 1751, and by 1753 he was totally blind, but he continued to conduct performances of his works on occasion. He is buried in Westminster Abbey. Handel's musical style exemplifies the vigor and grandeur of the late German baroque and at the same time has English and Italian qualities of directness, clarity, and charm. He strongly influenced English composers for a century after his death, and, following a period of relative neglect, he has again come to be recognized as one of music's great figures.

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