

HANDEL COMMEMORATIONS IN DUBLIN

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This performance of *Messiah* in the National Concert Hall, Dublin, on February, 2nd, 1986, is an historic occasion for two reasons. First, it commemorates Handel's visit to Dublin, a musical event never surpassed in the city's long history, and his beneficence to The Charitable Infirmary and Mercer's Hospital. Of interest to future historians may be the uniqueness of the event, in that a commemorative performance to aid these institutes cannot be held again as Mercer's Hospital (already closed) and The Charitable Infirmary (shortly to be joined with St. Laurence's Hospital) will not exist as the voluntary hospitals they were on the occasion of Handel's first performance of *Messiah* in the Musick Hall in Fishamble Street in 1742.

We may look back therefore from the vantage point of this historic performance to other events commemorating Handel in Dublin.

A performance of Handel's oratorio *Deborah* (composed in 1733) was held in 1748 to commemorate Handel's generosity to the Charitable Infirmary, and to raise funds for the hospital, when 351 tickets were issued to provide £194 10s 3d for investment. *Deborah* was performed annually in aid of the Charitable Infirmary until 1753.

In 1859, on the occasion of the Handel Centenary, *Messiah* was performed in Dublin in aid of Mercer's Hospital, and The Charitable Musical Society for the relief of distressed musicians. At this performance, Madame Goldschmidt (better known as Jenny Lind) was the major attraction.

In 1904, Handel's altruistic gesture to Mercer's Hospital was acknowledged on the cover of the Mirus Bazaar Programme on which his portrait and a piece of music from *Messiah* were featured. This bazaar at Ballsbridge was held in aid of Mercer's Hospital, an event that did not pass unnoticed by Leopold Bloom as he ambled up Molesworth Street to the National Library:

"Hello, placard. Mirus bazaar. His excellency the Lord Lieutenant. Sixteenth today it is. In aid of funds for Mercer's hospital. *The Messiah* was first given for that. Yes Handel. What about going out there. Ballsbridge".

(*James Joyce. Ulysses, p. 233*)

Messiah

Later the viceregal equipage on its way through the city from the Viceregal Lodge in the Phoenix Park attracts the attention of Dublin's denizens, among whom is Blazes Boylan:

“By the provost's wall came jauntily Blazes Boylan, stepping in tan shoes and socks with skyblue clocks to the refrain *My girl's a Yorkshire girl.*”

(Ulysses, p. 327)

Boylan's generosity of spirit, if not directed towards the charitable needs of Mercer's Hospital, is at least, in communion with the festive mood of the city:

“Blazes Boylan presented to the leaders' skyblue frontlets and high action a skyblue tie, a widebrimmed straw hat at a rakish angle and a suit of indigo serge. His hands in his jacket pockets forgot to salute but he offered to the three ladies the bold admiration of his eyes and the red flower between his lips.”

(Ulysses, p. 327)

In 1959, the Music Association of Ireland, held a Handel Festival and Exhibition to commemorate the bicentenary year of Handel's death in the Civic Museum in Dublin. The catalogue of this event is now of such historic interest that it serves as a fitting epilogue to this programme, and is published by kind permission of Patrick Johnston, the curator of the Civic Museum.