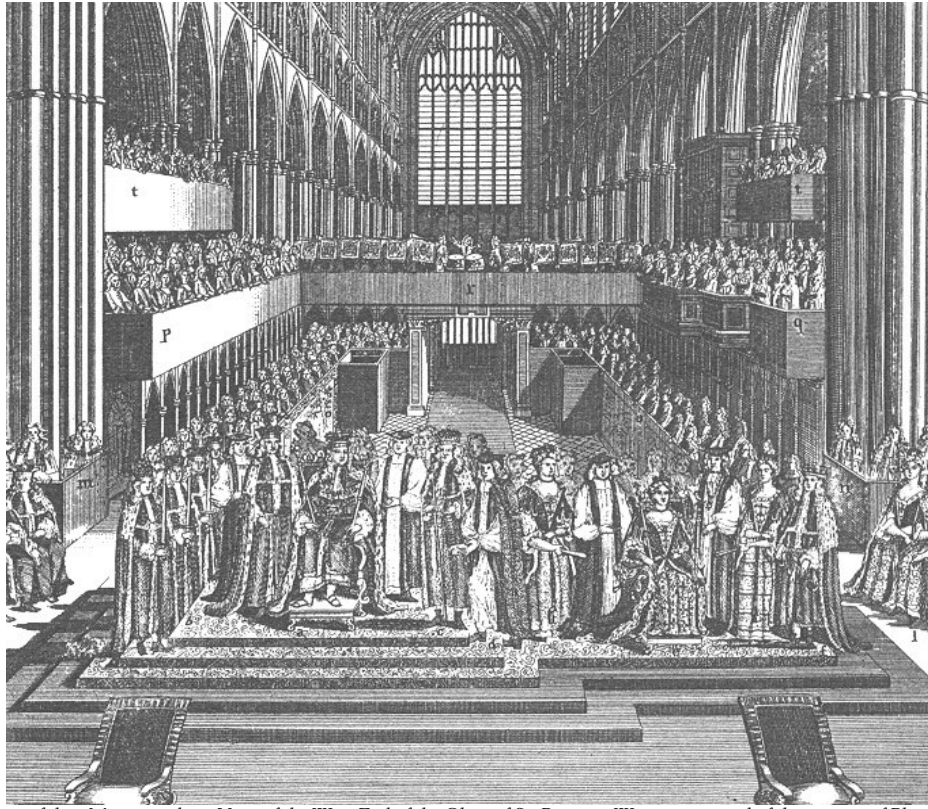


## BMC 44 - HANDEL: CORONATION ANTHEMS & Concerti a Due Cori



*"The Inthronization of their Majesties also a View of the West End of the Choir of St. Peters in Westminster, and of the manner of Placing and Seating the Company in that Part of the Choir."*

Handel was born in Halle on the Saale River in Thuringia, Eastern Germany on February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1685 – a vintage year indeed for Baroque composers including Alessandro Scarlatti and J.S. Bach.

Though his father had intended him for the law, Handel's own musical inclinations seem always to have been clear to him. At the age of 18, in 1703, he traveled to Hamburg, where he took a job as a violinist at the Hamburg Opera and gave private lessons to support himself. He became acquainted with Johann Mattheson (who later chronicled the known events of Handel's life during his stay there) and together they visited Buxtehude in Lübeck in that first year.

Whilst in Hamburg, Handel made the acquaintance of Prince Ferdinando de' Medici, son and heir of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, who invited him to visit Italy where he spent more than three years, in Florence, Rome, Naples and Venice. Italy was a great center of musical activity particularly during the first 20 years of the 1700s, and Handel was to meet and exchange ideas with many of the leading composers, musicians and nobility of the time - and not only Italians, for it was obligatory for every cultural and music-loving person of any rank or nobility to do the Grand European Tour which naturally included the main Italian cultural centers.

Thus on his travels around Italy Handel also made a number of useful contacts including the Duke of Manchester, the English Ambassador, and most significantly Prince Ernst August of Hanover, brother of the Elector (later King George I of England) who pressed him to visit Hanover. The Prince may also have intimated the possibility of a post at the Hanoverian Court, so that when Handel left Italy early in 1710 he headed for Hanover, and where he was soon appointed Capellmeister to the Elector of Hanover, George Louis.

The Royal Houses of Britain and Germany had always been closely inter-related, and the Act of Settlement of 1701 which secured the Protestant succession to the Crown of England, had made Handel's Hanoverian employer George Louis' Mother heiress-presumptive to the throne of Great Britain. In September 1714 Queen Anne died, and Britain had a new monarch. Thus it was that George Louis, Elector of Hanover and already naturalized by Act of Parliament in 1705, became King George I of England, initiating the Royal House of Hanover and subsequently inviting Handel to England in 1717, where he later became Royal Court composer.

In 1727, shortly before the death of George I, Handel had by now become a British subject, adopting his "new" names of George Frideric. Retaining his position as composer to the Chapel Royal (a post held since 1723), Handel was commissioned to compose the Anthems for the Coronation of George II and his consort Queen Caroline at Westminster Abbey on

October 11th, 1727 which was, by contemporary reports, an occasion of great magnificence. The music which Handel provided for the occasion was no less magnificent, and its reputation remained vivid for many years afterwards. Five years later, in 1732 the reputation of the Coronation Music was such that Handel advertised his first English Oratorio performance in a London theatre with the explanation "The Music to be disposed after the Manner of the Coronation Service'.

Certainly, contemporary accounts attest to the quality of Handel's music. *Parker's Penny Post* announced on October 4th: "Mr. Hendle (*sic*) has composed the Musick for the Abbey at the Coronation, and the Italian voices, with above a Hundred of the best Musicians will perform; and the Whole is allowed by those Judges in Musick who have already heard it, to exceed any Thing heretofore of the same Kind: It will be rehearsed this Week, but the time will be kept private, lest the Crowd of People should be an obstruction to the Performers." Later, the *Norwich Gazette* printed an account of the rehearsal of October 6th. "There were", the *Gazette* informed its readers, "40 Voices, and about 100 Violins, Trumpets, Hautboys, Kettle-Drums, and Bass's proportionable; besides an Organ, which was erected behind the Altar: And both the Musick and the Performers, were the Admiration of all the Audience."

We open with the Anthem **Let thy hand be strengthened**. Though scored only for strings and oboes, the music itself is splendid enough, here given a rousing performance by the Ambrosian Singers under the baton of Yehudi Menuhin.

### **Let thy hand be strengthened**

(*Allegro Moderato*) Let thy hand be strengthened, and thy right hand be exalted.

(*Larghetto*) Let justice and judgment be the preparation of thy seat; let mercy and truth go before thy face. Alleluia. (Psalm 89)

**My heart is inditing** opens with soloist alternation, later joined by the choir. This was the Anthem for the Crowning of King George's Consort, Queen Caroline, who was a patron of Handel as well as his staunch friend and supporter.

(*Andante*) **My heart is inditing of a good matter;**

**I speak of the things which I have made unto the King.**

(*Andante*) **Kings' daughters were among thy honourable women.**

(*Andante*) **Upon thy right hand did stand the queen in vesture of gold, and the king shall have pleasure in thy beauty.**

(*Allegro e staccato*) **Kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and Queens thy nursing mothers.** (Ps. 45)

**The King shall rejoice** makes full use of trumpets and drums.

(*Allegro*) **The King shall rejoice in thy strength, O Lord.**

(*Allegro*) **Exceeding glad shall he be of thy salvation.**

(*Non tanto allegro e tempo giusto*) **Glory and great worship hast thou laid upon him.**

(*Allegro non presto*) **Thou hast prevented him with the blessings of goodness, and hast set a crown of pure gold upon his head.**

(*Allegro non presto*) **Alleluia.** (Psalm 21)

The texts were selected by Handel himself from the Book of Kings and the Psalms. Handel prided himself on his knowledge of the Bible and is said to have declined the Bishop of London's choice of words for the Coronation Anthems. Interesting that, unknowingly though perhaps instinctively, Handel offers the King a subtle warning of his responsibilities to rule wisely and justly in the anthem "Let thy hand be strengthened", echoing sentiments which have been expressed in, and ever since, Magna Carta.

In the planning of our recordings we have always preferred, when appropriate, an alternation of sound spectrum; thus we have chosen to intersperse three Coronation Anthems with the three *Concerti a Due Cori*. This in fact works particularly well, since the *Concerti* can surely be said to equal the Anthems in splendor. Indeed, one could easily imagine the *Concerti* as being an accompaniment to the Coronation itself.

These are mature works dating from the late 1740s and originating with Handel's Oratorios. The title "*a due cori*" is not Handel's own, yet it accurately reflects the content since each is scored for two wind groups (designated *primo coro* and *secondo coro* by Handel himself) in addition to strings and continuo. The groups in all three *Concertos* contain oboes and bassoons, and in the two *Concertos* in F Major a pair of horns is added to each group, producing a sound which blends perfectly with that of the Anthems. If some of the tunes sound familiar one need not be surprised; Handel re-presented much of his music in different forms. Perhaps in a way the sense of familiarity thus generated has contributed to his lasting popularity.

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