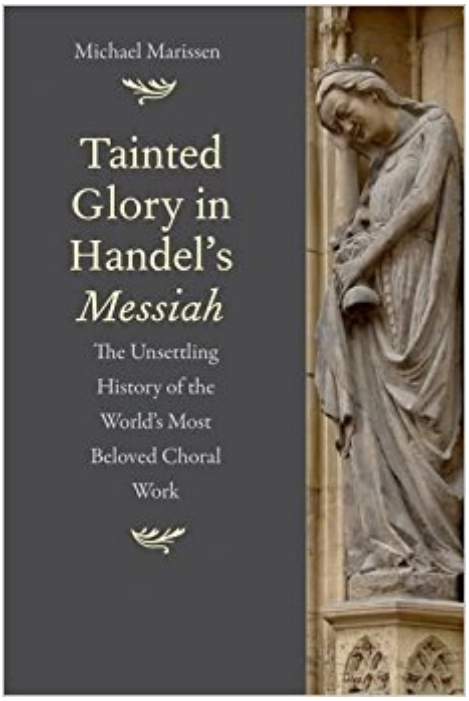
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Tainted Glory In Handel’s Messiah: The Unsettling History Of The World’s Most Beloved Choral Work



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Synopsis

An eye-opening reexamination of HandelÃ¢â ¬â„¢s beloved religious oratorio Every Easter, audiences across the globe thrill to performances of HandelÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Ã¢â ¬Å“Hallelujah Chorus,Ã¢â ¬Â• but they would probably be appalled to learn the full extent of the oratorioÃ¢â ¬â„¢s anti-Judaic message. In this pioneering study, respected musicologist Michael Marissen examines HandelÃ¢â ¬â„¢s masterwork and uncovers a disturbing message of anti-Judaism buried within its joyous celebration of the divinity of the Christ. Discovering previously unidentified historical source materials enabled the author to investigate the circumstances that led to the creation of the Messiah and expose the hateful sentiments masked by magnificent musical artistryÃ¢â ¬â •including the famed Ã¢â ¬Å“Hallelujah Chorus,Ã¢â ¬Â• which rejoices in the Ã¢â ¬Å“dashing to piecesÃ¢â ¬Â• of GodÃ¢â ¬â„¢s enemies, among them the Ã¢â ¬Å“people of Israel.Ã¢â ¬Â• MarissenÃ¢â ¬â„¢s fascinating, provocative work offers musical scholars and general readers alike an unsettling new appreciation of one of the worldÃ¢â ¬â„¢s best-loved and most widely performedÃ Â works of religious music.

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Customer Reviews

Ã¢â ¬Å“This is a highly significant piece of work.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Robin A. Leaver, Fellow of the Royal School of Church Music (Robin A. Leaver)Ã¢â ¬Å“When I read Michael MarissenÃ¢â ¬â„¢s essay of a few years back in which he first argued that there was anti-Judaism in some passages of the libretto of HandelÃ¢â ¬â„¢sÃ Â Messiah,Ã Â I was not fully persuaded. Tainted Glory in

HandelÃ¢ ¬â„¢s MessiahÃ Â has persuaded me. Marissen shows beyond a doubt that anti-Judaism was in the air in England at the time; so itÃ¢ ¬â„¢s not surprising that there would beÃ Â anti-Judaism in some passages ofÃ Â MessiahÃ¢ ¬â„¢sÃ Â libretto. But it is, as MarissenÃ¢ ¬â„¢s subtitle suggests, unsettling. We want HandelÃ¢ ¬â„¢s masterpiece to transcend its cultural context. It turns out that it does not, not entirely. It remains a masterpiece; but those who read MarissenÃ¢ ¬â„¢s book will find themselves listening with somewhat different ears.Ã¢ ¬Â•Ã¢ ¬â •Nicholas Wolterstorff, Noah Porter Professor Emeritus of Philosophical Theology, Yale University (Nicholas Wolterstorff)Ã¢ ¬Å“With superb mastery over the sources, both Christian and Jewish, Michael MarissenÃ¢ ¬â„¢s arresting argumentÃ Â indicates that even the most beloved and apparently ecumenical art works might rest on deep religious bigotry.Ã Â Boldly rebutting his contenders, MarissenÃ¢ ¬â„¢s lucidly articulated humanistic message instructs us that exposing the vexing components of our cherished pantheons would contribute to further understanding of the complexity of culture and the moral responsibility of its inheritors.Ã¢ ¬Â•Ã¢ ¬â •Ruth HaCohen, Artur Rubinstein Professor of Musicology, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem (Ruth HaCohen)Ã¢ ¬Å“Not for Messiah haters; but forÃ Â Messiah lovers who want to know what theyÃ¢ ¬â„¢re singing every year, warts and all.Ã¢ ¬Â•Ã¢ ¬â •David Van Biema, author of the forthcoming Speaking to God: A Cultural History of the Psalms (David Van Biema)Ã¢ ¬Å“This work . . . shows painstakingly cited original research.Ã¢ ¬Â•Ã¢ ¬â •Library Journal (Library Journal)

Michael Marissen is the Daniel Underhill Professor of Music at Swarthmore College. His publications include Lutheranism, Anti-Judaism, and BachÃ¢ ¬â„¢s St. John Passion and articles in Musical Quarterly, Harvard Theological Review, and the New York Times.

Book does an excellent analysis of the content of The Messiah, where it came from and what it’s theological agenda was. It’s great to have someone explain what these oratorios and other choral works of the period contain. The analysis of the text is lined up point by point with paraphrases of the theological intent and the original Biblical text to show the anti-Jewish Christian theological agenda of the subject content that Handel did such a beautiful job putting to music.This is a good book for anyone who wants to see in practice the assumptions of Christian triumphalist theology over Judaism. It’s not antisemitic theology as such but when utilized out of the Jewish historical context by modern Christian readers these New Testament texts utilized by Handel arrange a complete narrative of Jewish rejection and Christian replacement theology. This is one of a few texts

that have recently focused on the music and artistic libel against Jews.

As usual, Michael Marissen's book is convincing, thorough, and well written. It is a must read for any musician who performs Messiah. After reading this book, Handel/Jennen's somewhat baffling choice of texts and their orderings given the full context of the oratorio make sense, especially in regards to the placement of the Hallelujah Chorus. If you're one who likes scholarship that reveals uncomfortable truth which upsets the status quo, then you'll love this book. Is this new knowledge sufficient to derail Messiah as a vehicle for worship from its tracks? Get real. It's 2014. I doubt it.

In Tainted Glory in HandelÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Messiah, Michael Marissen seeks to illuminate ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Christian triumphalismÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• and ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“schadenfreudeÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• towards Jews in HandelÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Messiah. Marissen documents evidence that Messiah shows anti-Judaism in its construction.What I found helpful about MarissenÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s research is that he exposes the poor exegesis and uncharitable attitudes towards Jews among commentators who were Handel's contemporaries. And Marissen's work is also a much-needed balance to the romantic worship and divinifying of Handel's Messiah.But the more I read in his book the more I could feel his bias, which seemed one-sided against Christian orthodoxy. Marissen selects only information that supports his thesis, rather than looking at the whole picture and acknowledging the exceptions. For instance, he vaguely references ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“traditional Christian beliefsÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• without citing church authorities such as Augustine or Calvin. Many of his interpretations of passages do not reflect long-held beliefs within Christian orthodoxy such as man's sinful nature. His thesis also runs against much of what scholars know about HandelÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s personality, his compassionate spirit and his generous religious inclinations.I also felt that Marissen dismisses his detractors, many of them scholars who have invested much research of their own into the topic of Messiah, too quickly. He could afford a more charitable sense toward those who disagree, since a lack of charity is a part of the unseemly history he has exposed.Also, his thesis of the Hallelujah Chorus is really not tenable given the evidence he submits. There is at least as much evidence against his thesis as for it, including the fact that the chorus is placed in a difference "scene" from the previous aria, thus providing a conclusion to the entire Part 2, not just the preceding aria. The New York Times printed rebuttals from Handel scholar Ruth Smith and Princeton professor Wendy Heller that detail other reasons. This is not to say this topic is to be ignored. Marissen's work is important to consider, especially now that we have seen the consequences of anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism in the 20th

century.But I would maintain that the message of God’s grace and mercy, along with truth and justice, is an antidote to such evil treatment of others, and that this is gloriously portrayed in Handel’s Messiah. While it may show signs of being a work of its time, it also transcends that, being the first real musical "classic" that has withstood the test of time.

Marissen shows that The Messiah by Handel displays an antijudaism that goes well beyond merely claiming to be right (while Judaism was wrong). Indeed there are clear notes of schadenfreude over the destruction of Jerusalem (in 70 AD) which Handel, his librettist Jennens, and many of their contemporaries regarded as God’s punishment of the Jews for failing to accept Jesus as the long awaited Messiah. Marissen loves the music of Handel, but he insists that educated listeners of the 21st century need not also celebrate the ethically problematic posture of triumphalism. The author also shows how "typology" as an interpretive method worked in traditional Christianity, so the 2nd half of the book (containing an annotated libretto of the whole Messiah) clears up many otherwise puzzling passages. Marissen is steeped in the biblical criticism of the 17th and 18th centuries, and so he can speak with authority on these matters. This is an important book that deserves a wide readership.

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