

# George Frideric Handel

Jorj Frid'-ric Hahn'-dl

## A composer of the Baroque era.

As a child, George Frideric Handel showed a great deal of musical talent and planned to pursue music as a career. His local music teachers taught him as much as they could and encouraged his parents to further George's musical studies. His father, however, wanted George to become a lawyer. At the age of 17, George entered the University of Halle, in Germany, to study law. He maintained his interest in music by playing the organ at a nearby cathedral.

When his father died during George's first year at the university, George left school and joined an **opera** orchestra in Hamburg, Germany as a violinist. Here he began composing his first opera.

At 22, he moved to Italy to study opera. Italian audiences enjoyed opera and Italy had dozens of excellent **opera companies**. Europe's finest opera singers and composers all spent time in Italy, hoping to achieve success with Italian audiences. Most of Handel's early operas and **oratorios**, had Italian texts and were first performed in Italy.

In 1710 (age 25), he returned to Germany but soon left for England. Here he continued to write operas and sacred choral music, now with English instead of Italian texts. After a brief return to Germany in 1712, he moved back to England, where he lived for the rest of his life. He became a British citizen in 1726.

In 1720 (age 35), Handel was named artistic director of a new opera company, the Royal Academy of Music. During the next seven years, he wrote 14 operas for this group, as well as several oratorios. He also conducted the performances of his own operas. When the Royal Academy went bankrupt in 1728, he formed his own opera company for which he wrote 13 more operas. In 1737 this company also failed. Financially, Handel lost everything and suffered a stroke. It was the lowest point of his life, and he never totally regained his health.

Now, at the age of 53, Handel virtually gave up writing operas and turned his attention to oratorios. His oratorios, all in English, were hugely successful and popular in England and Ireland. He wrote his most famous oratorio, *Messiah*, in 1742, and it was an immediate success.

Handel was blunt and outspoken, and a tyrannical conductor of his music. But he was an honorable and respected composer, and except for the failure of his opera company he handled his finances well. He took his work seriously and wrote rapidly; in fact, he composed almost as fast as he could copy the notes.

George Handel wrote his first vocal music in German, his first operas in Italian, and his most famous oratorios in English. No other composer of vocal music has successfully written vocal music in so many languages.



*born*

**February 23, 1685**  
*Halle, Saxony (Germany)*

*died*

**April 14, 1759**  
*London, England*

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After the first performance of the *Messiah*, Handel said of the audience, “I am sorry if I have only succeeded in entertaining them; I wished to make them better.

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