

ORLANDO

Composer Biography: George Frideric Handel



Born on 23 February 1685 in Halle, Germany, Handel was the son of a barber-surgeon. He showed a marked gift for music and became a pupil in [Halle](#) of the composer Friedrich W. Zachow, learning the principles of [keyboard](#) performance and [composition](#) from him. His father died when Handel was 11, but his education had been provided for, and in 1702 he enrolled as a law student at the University of Halle. He also became organist of the Reformed ([Calvinist](#)) Cathedral in Halle, but he served for only one year before going north to [Hamburg](#), where greater opportunities awaited him. In Hamburg, Handel joined the [violin](#) section of the opera [orchestra](#). He also took over some of the duties of [harpsichordist](#), and early in 1705 he presided over the premiere in Hamburg of his first opera, *Almira*.

Handel spent the years 1706–10 traveling in Italy, where he met many of the greatest Italian musicians of the day, including [Arcangelo Corelli](#) and [Alessandro Scarlatti](#) and his son [Domenico](#). Handel's years in Italy greatly influenced the development of his musical style. His fame had spread throughout Italy, and his mastery of the Italian opera style now made him an international figure. In 1710 he was appointed Kapellmeister to the [elector](#) of [Hanover](#), the future King [George I](#) of [England](#), and later that year Handel journeyed to England. In 1711 his opera *Rinaldo* was performed in London and was greeted so enthusiastically that Handel sensed the possibility of continuing popularity and prosperity in England. In 1712 he went back to London for the production of his operas *Il pastor fido* and *Teseo* (1713). In 1713 he won his way into royal favour by his *Ode for the Queen's Birthday* and the *Utrecht Te Deum* and *Jubilate* in celebration of the [Peace of Utrecht](#), and he was granted an annual allowance of £200 by Queen [Anne](#).

In 1718 Handel became director of music to the duke of [Chandos](#), for whom he composed the 11 *Chandos Anthems* and the English [masque](#) *Acis and Galatea*, among other works. Another masque, *Haman and Mordecai*, was to be the effective starting point for the English oratorio.

Except for a few visits to the European continent, Handel spent the rest of his life in England. In February 1727 he became a British subject, which enabled him to be appointed a composer of the Chapel Royal. In this capacity he wrote much music, including the *Coronation Anthems for George II* in 1727 and the *Funeral Anthem for Queen Caroline* 10 years later.

Handel continued to live a dramatic and productive life during the 1740s, writing diverse works such as Biblical dramatic oratorios (*Samson*, *Belshazzar*, *Solomon*), secular music dramas based on Greek classical tragedies (*Semele* and *Hercules*) and patriotic concert works (*Judas Maccbaeus*). However, life wasn't easy for him. At various times, he was severely criticized by some voices of the English social establishment for his artistic endeavours - some had considered Italian operas ridiculous, but now others believed that presented Biblical concert dramas or musical settings of scripture was profane. For example, his famous oratorio *Messiah* was enthusiastically received at its première (Dublin, 1742) whereas it became the subject of great controversy following its London début a year later. Furthermore, from summer 1737 he suffered occasional bouts of serious physical illnesses. During the later years of his life, he experienced progressively debilitating cataracts, and the ensuing operations to restore his vision left him completely blind.

However, despite this adversity, Handel maintained a keen sense of humour and was well-known for his charitable disposition, and developed a particularly close association with the Foundling Hospital, which hosted annual benefit performances of *Messiah*. Most importantly, Handel created some of the most beguiling music ever written - not least his final two mature masterpieces *Theodora* and *Jephtha*. He died on 14 April 1759 and was buried in Poet's Corner, Westminster Abbey. Published only a year later, the anecdotal biography by John Mainwaring was the first printed book of any kind devoted to the life and work of a single composer. Although most widely known for *Messiah*, the *Water Music* and a few much-loved popular tunes, in the last few decades audiences and listeners all over the world have become fascinated anew by the theatrical diversity, insightfulness and charm of the range of the many prolific works of Mr. Handel.

Adapted from: www.gfhandel.org and www.britannica.com