

Tafelmusik



Over the past few seasons we have included a series of informal interviews with members of the Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra and Chamber Choir in our house programmes. This month we have the special opportunity to interview a very special guest, George Frideric Handel, who has joined us to conduct our annual Sing-Along Messiah since 1986.

You conducted many orchestras and choirs during your lifetime. What do think of the Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra and Chamber Choir?

Well, it is a very, very fine ensemble indeed. It is a special treat for me, because they perform the entire oratorio several times the week before the Sing-Along, so I don't even need to rehearse. That nimble-footed conductor, Herr Taurins, leads the rehearsals and conducts the other concerts at a church in the middle of the city – I once arrived early and crept in to listen. It was splendid – fine musicians all! And I must say that it is a delight to have women in the orchestra and choir. I never had that in my day!

Do you enjoy conducting the 2,700 audience members at Massey Hall?

I admit that the first time I was confronted by such a plethora of singers it was rather overwhelming! I also realized that I needed to keep fit (well, as much as my penchant for good food and drink would allow) to be able to conduct such an army of voices – it requires a lot of stamina. Keeping the tenors from dragging is always a challenge.

Why do you find it so difficult to get along with sopranos?

I contest your question! My relationships with singers during my lifetime were like carefully choreographed dances. Singers are, of course, artists, and one must nourish their sensitive egos with a measured amount of praise and encouragement. But one must also keep a tight rein, otherwise anarchy and chaos sets in. My soprani and castrati, though extremely

talented, were often the most high-strung and petulant of the lot. (My tenor John Beard, on the other hand, was – how do you say – the salt of the earth.) Hence, to be confronted by a veritable sea of soprani at Massey Hall is a daunting thing!!

How is your contract negotiated?

Very simply: two dozen crates of the finest claret to be placed at my dressing room door by the end of the performance.

What is your favourite aria? Chorus?

That is like asking a parent, “which is your favourite child?” But I must say that the duet “He shall feed his flock / Come unto him” has a special place in my soul, as does the “Amen.”

Do you use the internet, and have you seen the Tafelmusik Sing-Along Messiah video contest?

I am not savvy with all these blueberries and youphones and twitchers, but I have been informed of this contest, and hope that people will not be shy, and come forward with their own rendition of favourite music from my *Messiah*.

Had you ever directed a Sing-Along performance of any of your works before appearing with Tafelmusik 23 years ago?

Frankly, no ... Audience participation in my oratorios was not something I imagined or experienced in my career, but after I left this earth, I did have the opportunity to see how popular my *Messiah* had become and hear the increasing number of voices – 250 in 1784, and 2,500 in 1857 – well, what can I say? The next obvious step was a Sing-Along. And to be able to direct it myself, albeit posthumously, in the venerable old Massey Hall (though considerably younger than me, of course!) with such an energetic and enthusiastic crowd of singers, a wonderful orchestra and splendid soloists – it’s always a highlight of my year. And it is once again almost upon us!