



### **George Frideric Handel (1685 – 1759):**

Handel trained in Halle, Germany, then worked as a composer in Hamburg and Italy, before settling in London in 1712, where he spent the majority of his career, becoming naturalised as a British subject in 1727.

Consistently recognised as one of the greatest composers of his age, Handel is renowned for his operas, oratorios, anthems and organ concertos.

Influenced by middle-German polyphonic choral tradition and also the composers of Italian Baroque, Handel's style was 'high baroque'; bringing Italian opera to its highest development, creating the genres of English oratorio and organ concerto, and introducing a new style into English church music.

Handel started three commercial opera companies to supply the English nobility with Italian opera. However, he had a physical breakdown in 1737 and changed creative direction to provide more for the middle classes and made a transition to English choral works, and after his success with *Messiah* in 1742, he never composed an Italian opera again.

His orchestral works: 'Water Music' and 'Music for the Royal Fireworks' continue to be steadfastly popular. However, as one of his four coronation anthems; *Zadok the Priest*, has been performed at every British coronation since 1727, arguably it is that which is his greatest legacy.

Handel died, almost completely blind, in 1759. He was a greatly respected and rich man, and was given a state funeral at Westminster Abbey.

### **Programme Notes: Zadok the Priest:**

When Handel first arrived in England in 1710, it was with the wish of learning London's musical developments for the benefit of his employer at the time, the elector of Hanover, even though his visits to Hanover were few and far between.

When England's Queen Anne died without immediate heirs, the throne passed to her German cousin, the elector himself, who was crowned George I and pleased to gain the attentions of the long-absent Handel.

His son, George II, also preferred the work of his father's long-time favourite, and for his coronation in Westminster Abbey in October 1727, he requested that Handel write the music.

Handel finished writing his Four Coronation Anthems: Zadok the Priest, Let thy Hand be Strengthened, The King Shall Rejoice, My Heart is Inditing, less than a month before the coronation date.

Written as four separate pieces, but now most often published as a collection, the texts for all four anthems were picked by Handel—a personal selection from the most accessible account of an earlier coronation, that of James II in 1685.

Each of Handel's coronation anthems is a setting of a biblical text appropriate to the stages of the ceremony.

The text of Zadok the Priest, is a translation of the traditional antiphon 'Unxerunt Salomonem' derived from the biblical account of the anointing of Solomon, by the titular priest, Zadok (from the First book of Kings, in King James Bible – Kings 1:38-40). These words have been used in every English, and later British, coronation as far back as King Edgar in 973 at Bath Abbey.

Zadok the Priest accompanied the Anointing during the ceremony, and the God Save the King with which it ends provided a transition to the Crowning itself.

At its debut for the coronation of George II, despite the grand occasion, with 160 instrumentalists drowning the 40 voices of the combined choirs of the Abbey and the Chapel Royal, the full potential of the music was not realised; with the Archbishop of Canterbury adding the comment "Anthem in confusion".

However, the composition skill is obvious and the music masterfully captures the ceremony's progression of moods: from an opening instrumental that builds a strong sense of anticipation, through the opening commanding choral declaration "Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet," and culminates in shouts of rejoicing.

The anthem contains no recitatives or arias. Following the long introduction, the first vocal entry is one that makes an immediate impact, with Handel making a unique statement with a minimum of technical means. Handel's writing is in a triumphant, majestic, ceremonial manner, with a festive mood, and moments of intricate delicacy.

Zadok the priest  
and Nathan the prophet  
anointed Solomon king.

And all the people rejoiced and said:  
"God save the King!  
Long live the King!  
May the King live forever!

Amen! Amen! Alleluia!