# Homage *to* Handel

Félix-Alexandre Guilmant

Percy Grainger



Arno Landmann

Sigfrid Karg-Elert

**Peter King**

***Klais Organ of Bath Abbey***

Regent

# HOMAGE *to* Handel

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*Music by, and inspired by,*
*George Frideric Handel*

1. **March on a Theme of Handel** – Félix-Alexandre Guilmant (1837-1911) (7:20)
2. **Variationen über ein Thema von Georg Friedrich Händel** – Arno Landmann (1887-1966) (14:59)
3. **Variations on 'The harmonious blacksmith'** – George Frideric Handel (1685-1759) arr Sigfrid Karg-Elert (5:46)
4. **Capriccio in F** – Handel arr Karg-Elert (5:47)
5. **The Arrival of the Queen of Sheba** – Handel arr Ernest Maynard (4:05)

**Five Pieces for a Musical Clock** – Handel arr Fritz Spiegl

6. A Voluntary on a Flight of Angels (1:06)
7. Menuet in A minor (0:59)
8. Gigue (1:15)
9. Gavotte in A minor (0:40)
10. Gigue (0:40)

11. **Grand Chœur (Alla Handel)** – Guilmant (1837-1911) (7:15)
12. **Homage to Handel** – Karg-Elert (15:52)
    *54 Studies in Variation Form on a Ground Bass of Handel*
13. **Handel in the Strand** – Percy Grainger (1882-1961) arr Peter King (3:24)

*'Handel left behind him in his adopted country a name and a popularity which never has been, and probably never will be, rivalled by that of any other composer. Grandeur and simplicity, the majestic scale on which his compositions are conceived, the clear definiteness of his ideas and the directness of the means employed in carrying them out, pathetic feeling expressed with grave seriousness equally removed from the sensuous and the abstract – these are the distinguishing qualities of Handel's music.'*

Handel is one of the very few composers whose genius was internationally recognised and rewarded during their lifetime, and whose reputation continued to shine untarnished throughout the centuries after their death. Bach was forgotten for nearly a century, and after he was rediscovered he was – until quite recently – regarded as the preserve of an elite audience of connoisseurs, and too cerebral for a wider public. Handel, on the other hand, was for everyone, and succeeding generations were able to find in his music just what they wanted to find. In his adopted country of England it was the oratorios of his later years that particularly caught the public imagination. Raised to iconic status as matchless monuments of religious grandeur and evangelical piety, it increasingly seemed that their full sublimity could only be realised in performances on the most 'majestic scale'. The pattern was set by the first Handel Commemoration in Westminster Abbey in 1784, with a choir and orchestra of 500. In 1857 the triennial Handel Festivals were established at the Crystal Palace with an orchestra of 500 and a choir of 2000, which had doubled by the time of the last Festival in the 1920s. And this is the Handel to whom homage is paid in much of the music on this disc...

The quotation above comes from the first edition of Grove's musical dictionary (1879). A century later, the *New Grove* (1980) takes a very different line. The 'architect of the sublime' is consigned to the history books, and in the 21st century the essence of Handel's genius is found not exclusively in his oratorios, but in the delicate scoring and profound humanity of his operas – none of which was performed anywhere in the world between 1754 and 1920. Times change, but the genius of this much-loved composer continues to shine.

Together with Franck and Widor, who he succeeded in 1896 as Professor of Organ at the Conservatoire, **Alexandre Guilmant** was a leading light of the Parisian organ world in the latter part of the 19th century. Unlike his colleagues, Guilmant was also a dedicated scholar of early music: aided by the musicologist André Pirro he was responsible for the publication of the complete repertoire of French baroque organ music, most of which had been gathering dust in old libraries for a century or more. But Guilmant was still a man of his time, and his overblown approach to Handel was very much in the Crystal Palace mould (even French critics have described these works as 'Victorian'!). The Handelian theme of his popular **March** (1862) is minimal – just the first four notes of the chorus *Lift up your heads* from *Messiah*. But the dignified tune that he evolves out if this little motif is a classic example of his outstanding gift for elegant and memorable melody, and the fugue that follows is a tour-de-force of brilliant contrapuntal writing. The title of Guilmant's triumphant **Grand Choeur**

(1866) signifies a piece for the full reed and principal choruses of the organ, and they are employed to maximum effect in the thick chording and thunderous double-pedalling of this grandiose stylisation of a baroque minuet ('in the style of Handel'...!).

These pieces were composed during the final years of the Third Empire, but they found a perfect home in 1878, when Guilmant became curator of the big concert-hall organ of the Trocadéro. Newly built to house the Universal Exhibition – just seven years after the horrors and humiliations of the Franco-Prussian War and the Paris Commune – the Palais du Trocadéro was a monumental symbol of the resurgence of France under the new Republic. Surrounded by spectacular waterfalls and gardens, it was a gigantic building in Moorish/Byzantine style, and its centrepiece was a colossal domed concert hall designed to hold an audience of 5000. The hall was lavishly decorated. At the end were 'two triumphal columns surmounted by statues of Fame distributing crowns, with escutcheons entwined in laurel leaves and inscribed with *'Honneur aux Sciences! Gloire aux Arts!'*, while the frieze above the stage represented France summoning to her throne all the nations of the earth...

The two major works in this programme both come from Handel's native country. The German organist **Arno Landmann** was a friend of Max Reger, and he studied with the great Leipzig organist Karl Straube, who gave the first performances of most of Reger's organ works. After the completion of his studies Landmann spent most of his working career in the city of Mannheim, where he was the first organist of the colossal domed Christuskirche, from 1911 until 1943. With just under 100 stops (including an Echo division in the dome), the Steinmeyer organ of the Christuskirche is one of the most majestic late-romantic organs in southern Germany; it was an unfailing source of inspiration to Landmann throughout his life, and it has survived in original condition (though the church now has a second organ as well, a modern tracker instrument that conforms more comfortably to contemporary taste).

Landmann's **Variations** were inspired by the *Sarabande* from Handel's D minor Harpsichord Suite (No. 11) – a well-known theme whose seeming familiarity is increased by its resemblance to the old dance tune *La Folia*, which in its turn has inspired generations of composers from Corelli and Vivaldi to Rachmaninov. The work begins in a fairly conventional manner, with the D minor theme followed by four distinct variations which adhere closely to the original melody and harmony. But the first big climax takes an unexpected turn; the tonal centre shifts up a semitone, and from this point on Landmann develops the theme in a much more, rhapsodic, expressive, and harmonically wide-ranging style. The music that follows forms a kind of slow movement in what emerges as an almost symphonic design. A scherzo-like section leads back to the home key, and onwards to the D major finale which builds to a concluding climax of typically Germanic, heaven-storming intensity.

**Sigfrid Karg-Elert** spent most of his life in Bach's city of Leipzig, where he succeeded Max Reger as Conservatory Professor of Composition in 1919. At this time Reger was revered as a second Bach, the embodiment of the noblest and most profound spirit of German national art, but Karg-Elert was a bit of a rebel. His 'exceptionally imaginative and eccentric character' is reflected in all his music, and his love for 'decadent' foreign composers like Grieg, Debussy, and Scriabin attracted a good deal of criticism, which later intensified into open hostility. Fortunately perhaps, his death in 1933 at the age of 55 saved him from further humiliation.

In addition to a prolific quantity of original organ music, Karg-Elert also published around fifty imaginative organ arrangements of works from two centuries, by composers from Germany, Italy and France. In the preface to his amazing organ version of Handel's **Harmonious Blacksmith** he suggested that these 'virtuoso, brilliant, picturesque' variations are ideally suited to the modern organ. He freely expanded and thickened Handel's delicate original textures, substituted a whimsical new 4th variation of his own invention, and added a roof-raising coda at the end. The spurious title of Handel's *Air with Variations* only appeared in the early 19th century, and has been the subject of endless debate and speculation. The most likely solution has an interesting local connection: the man who first published the piece with the new title was a music-seller at Bath, named Lintern, who said 'It was a nickname given to himself, because he had been brought up as a blacksmith, although he had afterwards turned to music, and this was the piece he was constantly asked to play.'

Karg-Elert's transcription of another harpsichord work, the **Capriccio in F**, is much more restrained; filling in some chords, transferring the bass to the pedal, and adding some new thematic material for the left hand, he converted the two-voice original into a charming and stylish little organ piece.

The *Sinfonia* from Act III of Handel's rarely-heard oratorio *Solomon* (1748) was popularised in the early 20th century by Sir Thomas Beecham under the title of **The Arrival of the Queen of Sheba**. The standard organ arrangement of this piece was made by Ernest Maynard, a predecessor of Peter King at Bath Abbey, and published in 1930. More recently its festive sparkle and catchy descending bass line have made it a popular favourite for weddings, and it is regularly played all over the country, in churches large and small, every Saturday.

These three arrangements all re-interpret Handel's music to conform to the tastes and tonal ideals of a later age. They are followed by a rare curiosity representing his original art in its simplest and most delicate form: a selection of five miniatures composed for **Clay's Musical Clock**. The Royal Clockmaker Thomas Clay was one of the great artists and mechanics of Georgian London; his musical clocks (containing small organ pipes which played tunes automatically by means of a barrel or paper roll) were precursors of the Viennese clocks which were later graced with music by Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. Clay's masterpiece still survives at Windsor Castle: a marble pedestal containing a tiny organ (three stops of 20 notes each), supporting a decorated plinth containing the clock, and on top, a casket of rock crystal covered with exquisite decoration of silver, filigree

enamel and crystal. Handel supplied Clay with music for several different clocks, and these five pieces come from a manuscript in the Royal Music Library in the hand of his amanuensis John Smith. They were edited and published by Fritz Spiegl in 1955.
In 1914 **Karg-Elert** was elected an Honorary Fellow of the Royal College of Organists in London, and he expressed his gratitude by composing a large-scale work in homage to England's favourite composer. In his preface to the work he wrote that 'the memory of the great master Handel, whom both England and Germany claim as their own, has been invoked as a symbol of the close ties which bind English and German music' (an admirable sentiment which would probably not have pleased the German authorities at the time...)

Subtitled '54 Studies in Variation Form on a ground bass of Handel', **Homage to Handel** was inspired by the *Passacaglia* which ends Handel's Seventh Harpsichord Suite in G minor; it incorporates both the ground bass and a number of Handel's accompanying melodic motifs. The four-bar bass consists simply of four sequential falling fifths, and Karg-Elert adheres strictly to the straightforward harmonic implications of this theme (except towards the end, where some unexpected chords begin to creep in), but he avoids monotony as far as humanly possible by means of a kaleidoscopic range of textures and colours, from a single line of melody to a great piling up of glissandi and demonic manual and pedal trills on the massive final pages. 'Side by side with typical organ effects,' he said, are found purely 'orchestral' variations (Gamba solo, Duet, Flute solo, Flute Duologue, Woodwind quartet, Trumpet ensemble, Brass Band) which are to be played as far as possible with unmixed natural colours. Special notice is directed to the delightful harmonic (mutation) combinations of which I always make a strong feature…' Some of the most piquant sound effects are annotated with evocative directions like *quasi campanelle, quasi spinetta* and *quasi xylophon*, and the Bath Abbey organ's new set of bells comes into its own here. The composer conceived the structure of the whole work as falling broadly into three sections:
Variations 1 –19: a steady crescendo, gradually increasing in volume and animation to a big climax, which incorporates a brief reference to the *Hallelujah Chorus*.
20-28: a quiet central section, with 'delicate solo stops of chamber music transparency, echo effects, and courtly figures in the olden style.'
29-54: 'beginning with the old 'Portative Organ' (solo flute), and steadily increasing to the pompous brilliance of the modern *tutti*'. Echoing the spirit of the old Handel Festivals, the final variation is marked *trionfante e gigantica*.

Australian-born **Percy Grainger** was one of the most colourful characters in the rich panorama of 20th century music. Many of his most successful pieces are arrangements of folksongs or of other composers' tunes, and his jolly 'Clog Dance' **Handel in the Strand** (1914) incorporates a few passages from a set of variations that he had written some years earlier on the theme of *The Harmonious Blacksmith*. The assonance of the title neatly indicates the character of the music. Handel has strayed here into the insouciant world of Edwardian London's

**Bath Abbey organ** was built by Johannes Klais of Bonn in 1997 and stands in the North Transept. It incorporates some pipework from earlier instruments, as well as the fine case of 1914 designed by Sir Thomas Jackson. The instrument has 62 stops, distributed between 4 manuals and pedals (32'). Regularly featured as a concert instrument at the Bath International Festival and the Bath Mozartfest, as well as on BBC Radio 3, it is considered by many to be amongst the finest organs in the country. From 2003 audiences at organ recitals have been able to watch the performer via a video link.

## Specification

**Pedal** (C – $g_1$)

| | |
|---|---|
| Double Open Diapason | 32 |
| Open Diapason | 16 |
| Open Wood | 16 |
| Bourdon | 16 |
| Violone | 16 |
| Principal | 8 |
| Bass Flute | 8 |
| Cello | 8 |
| Fifteenth | 4 |
| Mixture | IV |
| Contra Posaune | 32 |
| Trombone | 16 |
| Posaune | 16 |
| Clarion | 8 |
| Pos/Pd Gt/Pd Sw/Pd So/Pd | |

**III Swell** (C – $c_4$)

| | |
|---|---|
| Bourdon | 16 |
| Open Diapason | 8 |
| Lieblich Gedackt | 8 |
| Viola da Gamba | 8 |
| Voix Celeste | 8 |
| Principal | 4 |
| Tapered Flute | 4 |
| Flageolet | 2 |
| Mixture | V |
| Oboe | 8 |
| Vox Humana | 8 |
| Contra Fagotto | 16 |
| Trumpet | 8 |
| Clarion | 4 |
| Tremulant | |
| Sub Octave | |
| So/Sw | |

**I Positive** (C – $c_4$)

| | |
|---|---|
| Stopped Diapason | 8 |
| Principal | 4 |
| Chimney Flute | 4 |
| Fifteenth | 2 |
| Sesquialtera | II |
| Mixture | IV |
| Crumhorn | 8 |
| Tremulant | |
| Sw/Pos So/Pos | |

**II Great** (C – $c_4$)

| | |
|---|---|
| Double Open Diapason | 16 |
| Open Diapason | 8 |
| Doppel Flute | 8 |
| Gamba | 8 |
| Principal | 4 |
| Open Flute | 4 |
| Twelfth | $2^2/_3$ |
| Fifteenth | 2 |
| Full Mixture | IV |
| Sharp Mixture | III |
| Cornet | V |
| Double Trumpet | 16 |
| Posaune | 8 |
| Clarion | 4 |
| Pos/Gt Sw/Gt So/Gt | |

**IV Solo** (C – $c_4$)

| | |
|---|---|
| Stopped Diapason | 8 |
| Salicional | 8 |
| Unda Maris | 8 |
| Flauto Traverso | 4 |
| Gemshorn | 4 |
| Nazard | $2^2/_3$ |
| Piccolo | 2 |
| Tierce | $1^3/_5$ |
| Larigot | $1^1/_3$ |
| Cor Anglais | 16 |
| Trompette | 8 |
| Clarinet | 8 |
| Tuba Mirabilis | 8 |
| Tremulant | |
| Sub Octave | |
| Octave | |
| Cymbelstern | |
| Glockenspiel (bells) | |

Full complement of pistons, multi-channel, sequencer, etc.



A former student of Dame Gillian Weir and Allan Wicks (Organ), and Ronald Smith (Piano), **Peter King** was appointed Organist and Master of the Choristers at Bath Abbey in 1986. Under his direction the Abbey Choir has recently completed successful visits to Germany and The Netherlands where it gave one of the opening concerts following the restoration of the famous S. Laurens Kerk in Alkmaar. The Choir has released many CDs, *Music for an Abbey's Year*, Years 1-4, complementing Peter's many organ CDs with the Priory and Regent labels including a disc of concertos with the *BBC National Orchestra of Wales* on Regent. Early in 1997 Bath Abbey instituted a Girls' Choir under Peter's direction; it has already established itself as one of the finest musical ensembles in Bath. Its CD recordings include *Bath Abbey Girls' Choir sings Christmas Carols*, (Priory Records) and *The Matchless Maidens of Bath Abbey* (Regent Records). Together with Nicolas Kynaston, Peter was responsible for overseeing the design and installation of the Klais Organ in Bath Abbey.

He was Accompanist and Assistant Chorus Director to the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra during the whole of Sir Simon Rattle's reign as Musical Director and he still plays the organ regularly with the orchestra. He plays on Sir Simon Rattle's EMI recordings of Mahler's *Resurrection Symphony* and *Symphony of a Thousand*. As an organist he has appeared at the Bath, St Albans, Cheltenham, Lichfield and Salisbury International Festivals, and has made five recital tours of the USA. He can be heard playing organ and harmonium in recordings of Bruckner, Rossini (*Petite Messe Solennelle*) and Grainger with the CBSO Chorus on the Conifer label.

Peter King's recent work has included concerts in Austria, France, Flanders, Germany, Romania, Spain, Switzerland, The Netherlands and The Czech Republic, where he accompanied the Chamber Choir of the Charles University in a performance in Prague of Petr Eben's *Vesperae in festo nativitatis BVM* in the presence of the composer. In 1999 he gave a series of ten lecture recitals on the history of the organ and its repertoire for Bristol University. Other highlights have included recitals at Ingolstadt Minster and Cologne Cathedral, an opening recital on the new Schuke Organ in Palacio Euskalduna, Bilbao, and Birmingham, where he played at the opening of the new Klais Organ in Symphony Hall. He has appeared as soloist with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra (Saint-Saëns' *Symphonie iii*, the "Organ Symphony") and The Academy of St Martin-in-the-Fields (Poulenc's *Organ Concerto*). His recitals at the Bath Mozartfest in 1999 and 2001 were both broadcast on BBC Radio 3. In 2003 he received the honorary degree of Doctor of Music from the University of Bath.