



**THE COMPOSER IN QUESTION
HANDEL**

TUESDAY 20 DECEMBER

Handel, consummate eighteenth-century traveller, performer, composer and entrepreneur, was born in Halle, Saxony in 1685, the same year as Bach. He grew up with a mother who nurtured his musical gifts and a father who hated music and insisted that his son study law. Following his father's death, and brief law studies, Handel travelled to Hamburg, where he scraped a living as a back-desk violinist at the opera house and composed his first opera *Almira*. By late 1706 he travelled to Italy, where he composed church, secular and theatre music for illustrious patrons in Florence, Rome, Naples and Venice; he also met numerous Italian composers who significantly influenced his work, such as Arcangelo Corelli, Alessandro Scarlatti and his son Domenico Scarlatti. The following year he left for London, where he produced the first Italian opera composed specifically for London. Absorbing England's best music and integrating it into his own works, by 1719 he was Master of the Orchestra at the Royal Academy of Music in London. He set up his own New Royal Academy of Music in 1727. One of his most remarkable shifts of emphasis took place when he abandoned operas for oratorios, and adapted some of his writing by translating it into English. The best-known of these was commissioned by the Lord Lieutenant of Dublin in 1741, and *Messiah* made its debut there the following year. Later oratorios still in the repertoire include *Belshazzar*, *Judas Maccabeus*, *Joshua*, *Solomon*, and the almost unbearably moving *Jeptha*. In England, he was called the "great bear" because of his huge size, awkward walk and gruff manner. Handel was well known for his temper and the way he would yell at a performer who did not follow his orders. When one singer refused to sing a piece as Handel ordered, he actually held her out of a window.