

## Music Notes for September 21st

**Prelude:** G.F. Handel: *Air with variations*

**Introit:** Gustav Holst: *Sing to the Lord*

**Anthem:** G.F. Handel: *But as for his people from Israel in Egypt*

**Offertory:** G.F. Handel: *Toccata*

**Benediction Response:** Sir Arthur Sullivan: *Sweet Saviour, Bless us ere we go*

**Postlude:** G.F. Handel: *Concerto in G Major*

Today's anthem comes from one of the great oratorios of Handel: *Israel in Egypt*. Handel enjoyed great success as a composer in England, writing in many different genres, the most popular of which were the Italian opera and English oratorio. Although the oratorios draw primarily from sacred subjects and many have at least some of their words taken directly from the King James Bible, they were not originally intended for church performance. *Israel in Egypt* tells the story of the Exodus, using an unusually large number of choruses and fewer solo pieces than a work like *Messiah*.

The chorus *But as for his people* comes at the end of the sequence of the plagues, many of which are brilliantly illustrated for double choir. (One of the more famous examples is the plague of locusts where the violins play very quick, buzzy trills. A director of mine suggested that if it is done well, the whole audience should be trying to brush away the flies by the end!) It has three principal moods, corresponding to the text. The words "he led them forth like sheep" are set very gently with accompanying shepherd's pipes. The text "he brought them out with silver and gold" is given a rich polyphonic treatment with long overlapping lines. Finally "there was not one feeble person among their tribes" is set triumphantly with chorus and organ all together.

The text of the chorus comes from Psalm 78:52 and Psalm 105:37. Handel used the text of the King James Bible. In the New Revised Standard version of the Bible, the two verses read:

*Then he led out his people like sheep, and guided them in the wilderness like a flock. (Ps. 78:52)*

*Then he brought Israel out with silver and gold, and there was no one among their tribes who stumbled. (Ps. 105:37)*

The three organ pieces come from a collection of Handel known as *The Aylesford Pieces*. These are believed to have been written when Handel was a guest at the country estate of Lord Aylesford, where the manuscripts remained undiscovered until 1918, when the estate held an auction. The pieces have been authenticated; a few had been published in Handel's lifetime. Less serious in character than much of Handel's keyboard music, they remind us that great art need not be overly formal.

The introit is a hymn arranged from a wind band suite by Gustav Holst, whose 134th birthday is celebrated today. The words are by Isaac Watts, a prolific English hymnwriter born 200 years before Holst and often referred to as the "Father of English Hymnody." The response is a short hymn by Sir Arthur Sullivan, another of England's best-known hymnwriters, as well as a composer of considerable polish and, of course, humor.

Thomas Dawkins, organist/choir director