

JUDAS MACCABAEUS

The Riverside Church
American Symphony Orchestra
Leon Botstein, Conductor

Thursday, December 14, 2023
7PM Concert
Leon Botstein, *conductor*



A M E R I C A N
S Y M P H O N Y
O R C H E S T R A



T R C
N Y C

JUDAS MACCABAEUS

LEON BOTSTEIN, CONDUCTOR

GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL (1685-1759)

Judas Maccabaeus, HWV 63 (1746)

PART I

INTERMISSION

PART II

PART III

JACK SWANSON, Judas Maccabaeus

WILLIAM GUANBO SU, Simon (Judas' brother)

BRANDIE SUTTON, Israelitish Woman

DEBORAH NANSTEEL, Israelitish Man and Priest

STEVEN MOORE, Eupolemus (the Jewish Ambassador to Rome)

ALLISON GISH, Israelitish Messenger I

RODERICK GOMEZ, Israelitish Messenger II

With Members of

BARD FESTIVAL CHORALE

THE RIVERSIDE CHOIR

This evening's concert will run approximately 2 hour and 15 minutes with one 20 minute intermission.

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AMERICAN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

The American Symphony Orchestra was founded 62 years ago in 1962 by Leopold Stokowski with the mission of providing music within the means of everyone. Music Director Leon Botstein expanded that mission when he joined the ASO in 1992, creating thematic concerts that explore music from the perspective of the visual arts, literature, religion, and history, and reviving rarely performed works that audiences would otherwise never have a chance to hear performed live.

The ASO's signature programming includes its *Vanguard Series*, which presents concerts of rare orchestral repertoire, and various other events dedicated to enriching and reflecting the diverse perspectives of American culture. During the summer months, the ASO is the orchestra-in-residence at Bard's SummerScape, performs at the Bard Music Festival, and offers chamber music performances throughout the New York City area.

As part of its commitment to expanding the standard orchestral repertoire, the ASO has released recordings on the Telarc, New World, Bridge, Koch, and Vanguard labels, and live performances are also available for digital streaming. In many cases, these are the only existing recordings of some of the forgotten works that have been restored through ASO performances.

For more information, please visit americansymphony.org.

THE RIVERSIDE CHURCH

The Riverside Church is an interdenominational, interracial, international, open, welcoming, and affirming church and congregation located in the Morningside Heights neighborhood in Manhattan, near Columbia University where Harlem meets the Upper West Side. Visitors are welcome and tours are available. It is modeled after the 13th Century gothic cathedral in Chartres, France. Its gothic tower stands as a beacon to the world and continues to bring people with very different perspectives together.

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TEXT

GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL (1685-1759). *Judas Maccabaeus*, HWV 63 (1746)

Libretto by **Thomas Morell (1703-1784)**

PART ONE

The Israelites mourn the death of Mattathias, father of Judas Maccabaeus.

The People of Israel

Mourn, ye afflicted children,
the remains of captive Judah,
mourn in solemn strains;
your sanguine hopes of liberty give o’er,
your hero, friend and father is no more.

Israelitish Man

Well may your sorrows, brethren, flow
in all th’expressive signs of woe:
your softer garments tear,
and squalid sackcloth wear;
your drooping heads with ashes strew,
and with the flowing tear your cheeks bedew.

Israelitish Woman

Daughters, let your distressful cries
and loud lament ascend the skies;
your snowy bosoms beat, and tear,
with hands remorseless, your dishevell’d hair.
For pale and breathless Mattathias lies,
sad emblem of his country’s miseries.

Both

From this dread scene,
these adverse pow’rs, ah!
Whither shall we fly?
O Solyma, thy boasted tow’rs
in smoky ruins lie.

Israelites

For Sion lamentation make,
with words that weep
and tears that speak.

Israelitish Man

Not vain is all this storm of grief,
to vent our sorrows, gives relief.
Wretched indeed!
But let not Judah’s race
their ruin with desponding arms embrace.
Distractful doubt and desperation
ill become the chosen nation,
chosen by the great “I am,”
the Lord of Hosts,
who, still the same, we trust,
will give attentive ear
to the sincerity of pray’r.

Israelitish Woman

Pious orgies, pious airs,
decent sorrow, decent pray’rs,
will to the Lord ascend,
and move his pity,
and regain his love.

Israelites

O Father, whose almighty pow’r
the heav’ns and earth and seas adore!
The hearts of Judah, thy delight,
in one defensive band unite.
And grant a leader bold and brave,
if not to conquer, born to save.

Simon

I feel the Deity within,
who (the bright cherubim between)
his radiant glory erst display’d:
to Israel’s distressful pray’r
he hath vouchsafe’d a gracious ear,
and points out Maccabaeus to their aid.
Judas shall set the captive free,
and lead us on to victory.

Arm, arm ye brave; a noble cause,
the cause of Heav’n your zeal demands.
In defence of your nation, religion, and laws,
the almighty Jehovah
will strengthen your hands.

Israelites

We come in bright array,
Judah, thy sceptre to obey.

Judas Maccabaeus

’Tis well, my friends;
with transport I behold
the spirit of our fathers, fam’d of old
for their exploits in war.
O may they fire with active courage
you, their sons, inspire:
as when the mighty Joshua fought,
and those amazing wonders wrought,
stood still, obedient
to his voice, the sun,
till kings he had destroy’d,
and kingdoms won.

Call forth thy pow’rs, my soul, and dare
the conflict of unequal war.
Great is the glory of the conqu’ring sword,
that triumphs in sweet liberty restor’d.

Israelitish Woman

To Heav’n’s immortal King we kneel,
for blessings on this exemplary zeal.
Bless him, Jehovah,
bless him, and once more
To thy own Israel liberty restore.

O liberty, thou choicest treasure,
seat of virtue, source of pleasure;

life without thee knows no blessing,
no endearment worth caressing.

Israelitish Woman and Israelitish Man

Come, ever-smiling liberty,
and with thee bring thy jocund train.
Come, ever-smiling liberty,
for thee we pant, and sigh for thee,
with whom eternal pleasures reign.

Israelites

Lead on, lead on! Judah disdains
the galling load of hostile chains.

Judas Maccabaeus

So will’d my father, now at rest
in the eternal mansions of the blest:
“*Can ye behold,*” said he “*the miseries,*
in which the long-insulted Judah lies?
Can ye behold their sore distress,
and not, at least, attempt redress?”
Then, faintly, with expiring breath—
“*Resolve, my sons, on liberty, or death.*”

We come, we come;
O see, thy sons prepare
the rough habiliments of war;
with hearts intrepid, and revengeful hands,
to execute, O sire, thy dread commands.

Israelites

Disdainful of danger,
we’ll rush on the foe,
that thy pow’r, O Jehovah,
all nations may know.

Judas Maccabaeus

Ambition!
If e’er honor was thine aim,
challenge it here:
the glorious cause
gives sanction to thy claim.

No, no unhallow’d desire
our breasts shall inspire,
no, nor lust of unbounded pow’r.
But peace to obtain,
free peace let us gain,
and conquest shall ask no more.

Israelites

Hear us, O Lord,
on thee we call,
resolv’d on conquest,
or a glorious fall.

PART TWO

Israelites

Fall’n is the foe.
So fall thy foes, O Lord,
Where warlike Judas
wields his righteous sword!

Israelitish Man

Victorious hero!
Fame shall tell, with her last breath,
how Apollonius fell,
and all Samaria fled, by thee pursued
through hills of carnage and a sea of blood.
While thy restless prowess dealt around,
with their own leader’s sword,
the deathful wound.
Thus, too, the haughty Seron, Syria’s boast,
before thee fell with his unnumber’d host.

So rapid thy course is,
not numberless forces
withstand thy all-conquering sword.
Tho’ nations surround thee,
no pow’r shall confound thee,
’till freedom again be restor’d.

Israelitish Woman

O let eternal honors crown his name;
Judas! First worthy in the rolls of fame.
Say, “*He put on the breast-plate as a giant,*
and girt his warlike harness about him.
In his acts he was like a lion,
and like a lion’s whelp
roaring for his prey.”

From mighty kings he took the spoil,
and with his acts made Judah smile.
Judah rejoiceth in his name,
and triumphs in her hero’s fame.

Israelitish Woman, Man, and Chorus

Hail, hail, hail,
Judea, happy land!
Salvation prospers in his hand.

Judas Maccabaeus

Thanks to my brethren.
But look up to Heav’n;
to Heav’n let glory
and all praise be giv’n;
to Heav’n give your applause,
nor add the second cause,
as erst your fathers did in Midian,
saying, “*the sword of God and Gideon.*”
It was the Lord that for his Israel fought,
and this our wonderful salvation wrought.

How vain is man who boasts in fight
the valor of gigantic might.
And dreams not that a hand unseen
directs and guides this weak machine.

Israelitish Messenger

O Judas, O my brethren!
New scenes of bloody war
in all their horrors rise.
Prepare, or soon we fall
a sacrifice to great Antiochus;
from the Egyptian coast
(where Ptolomy hath Memphis
and Pelusium lost)
he sends the valiant Gorgias,
and commands his proud,
victorious bands
to root out Israel’s strength,
and to erase ev’ry memorial
of the sacred place.

Israelitish Woman

Ah! Wretched, wretched Israel!
Fall’n, how low,
from joyous transport
to desponding woe.

Israelites

Ah! Wretched Israel!
Fall’n, how low,
From joyous transport
to desponding woe.

Simon

Be comforted.
Nor think these plagues are sent
for your destruction,
but for chastisement.
Heav’n oft’ in mercy punisheth,
that sin may feel
its own demerit from within,
and urge not utter ruin.
Turn to God,
and draw a blessing from his iron rod.

The Lord worketh wonders
his glory to raise.
And still, as he thunders,
is fearful in praise.

Judas Maccabaeus

My arms!
Against this Gorgias will I go.
The Idumean governor shall know
how vain, how ineffective his design,
while rage his leader, and Jehovah mine.

Sound an alarm!
Your silver trumpets sound,
and call the brave,
and only brave, around.
Who listeth, follow:
to the field again.
Justice with courage
is a thousand men.

Israelites

We hear the pleasing, dreadful call:
and follow thee to conquest; if to fall,
for laws, religion, liberty, we fall.

We follow thee,
we hear the pleasing, dreadful call:
and follow thee to conquest; if to fall,
for laws, religion, liberty, we fall.

Simon

Enough!
To Heav’n we leave the rest.
Such gen’rous ardor firing ev’ry breast,
we may divide our cares.
The field be thine, O Judas,
and your sanctuary mine.
For Sion, holy Sion, seat of God,
in ruinous heaps, is by the heathen trod;
such profanation calls for swift redress,
if e’er in battle Israel hopes success.

With pious hearts, and brave as pious,
O Sion, we thy call attend,
nor dread the nations that defy us,
God our defender, God our friend.

Israelitish Man

Ye worshippers of God!
Down, down
with the polluted altars, down.
Hurl Jupiter Olympius from his throne,
nor reverence Bacchus with his ivy crown
and ivy-wreathed rod.
Our fathers never knew him,
or his beastly crew,
or, knowing, scorn’d such idol vanities.

Israelitish Woman

No more in Sion
let the virgin throng,
wild with delusion pay their nightly song
to Ashtoreth, yclep’d the queen of Heav’n.
Hence, to Phoenicia be the Goddess driv’n;
or be she, with her priests
and pageants, hurl’d
to the remotest corner of the world,
ne’er to delude us more with pious lies.

Israelitish Woman and Man

O! Never, never bow we down
to the rude stock or sculptur’d stone.
But ever worship Israel’s God,
ever obedient to his awful nod.

Israelites

We never will bow down
to the rude stock or sculptur’d stone,
We worship God, and God alone.

PART THREE

Israelitish Priest

Father of Heav’n, from thy eternal throne,
look with an eye of blessing down;
while we prepare with holy rites,
to solemnize the feasts of lights.
And thus our grateful hearts employ;
and in thy praise, this altar raise,
with carols of triumphant joy.

Israelitish Woman

O grant it, Heav’n,
that our long woes may cease,
and Judah’s daughters taste
the calm of peace;
sons, brothers, husbands
to bewail no more,
tortur’d at home,
or havock’d in the war.

So shall the lute and harp awake,
and sprightly voice sweet descant run,
seraphic melody to make,
in the pure strains of Jesse’s son.

Israelitish Messenger I

From Capharsalama,
on eagle wings I fly,
with tidings of impetuous joy.
Came Lysias, with his host,
array’d in coat of mail;
their massy shields of gold, and brass,
flash’d lightning o’er the fields,
while the huge tow’r-back’d elephants
display’d a horrid front;
but Judas, undismay’d,
met, fought, and vanquish’d
all the rageful train.

Yet more;
Nicanor lies with thousands slain;
the blasphemous Nicanor,
who defied
the living God, and,
in his wanton pride,
a public monument ordain’d
of victories yet ungain’d.

Israelitish Messenger II

But lo!
The conqueror comes;
and on his spear,
to dissipate all fear,
he bears the vaunter’s head, and hand,
that threaten’d desolation to the land.

Chorus of Youths

See, the conqu’ring hero comes!
Sound the trumpet, beat the drums.
Sports prepare, the laurel bring,
songs of triumph to him sing.

Chorus of Maidens

See the godlike youth advance,
breathe the flutes, and lead the dance.
Myrtle wreaths, and roses twine,
to deck the hero’s brow divine.

Both Choruses

See, the conqu’ring hero comes!
Sound the trumpet, beat the drums.
Sports prepare, the laurel bring,
songs of triumph to him sing.

Israelites

Sing unto God,
and high affections raise,
to crown this conquest
with unmeasur’d praise.

Judas Maccabaeus

Sweet flow the strains,
that strike my feasted ear.
Angels might stoop
from Heav’n to hear
the comely songs ye sing,
to Judah’s Lord and King.

But pause awhile:
due obsequies prepare
to those who bravely fell in war.
To Eleazar special tribute pay.
Through slaughter’d troops
he cut his way
to the distinguish’d elephant,
and, whelm’d beneath
the stabbed monster,
triumph’d in a glorious death.

With honor let desert be crown’d,
the trumpet ne’er in vain shall sound,
but, all attentive to alarms,
the willing nations fly to arms,
and, conquering or conquer’d,
claim the prize
of happy earth,
or far more happy skies.

Eupolemus

Peace to my countrymen;
Peace, and liberty.
From the great senate of imperial Rome,
with a firm league of amity, I come.
Rome, whate’er nation dare insult us more,
will rouse, in our defence, her vet’ran pow’r,
and stretch her vengeful arm, by land or sea,
“to curb the proud,
and set the injur’d free.”

Israelites

To our great God
be all the honor giv’n,
that grateful hearts can send
from earth to Heav’n.

Israelitish Woman

Again to earth let gratitude descend.
Praiseworthy is our hero,
and our friend.
Come then, my daughters,
choicest art bestow,
to weave a chaplet for the victor’s brow;
and in your songs for ever be confess’d
“*the valour that preserv’d,
the pow’r that bless’d,
bless’d you with hours,
that scatter, as they fly,
soft quiet, gentle love,
and boundless joy.*”

Israelitish Woman and Israelitish Man

O lovely peace, with plenty crown’d,
come, spread thy blessings all around.
Let fleecy flocks the hills adorn,
and vallies smile with wavy corn.
Let the shrill trumpet cease,
nor other sound
but nature’s songsters
wake the cheerful morn.

Simon

Rejoice, O Judah,
and in songs divine,
with cherubim and seraphim
harmonious join!

Israelites

Hallelujah! Amen.
O Judah, rejoice,
in songs divine
with cherubim and seraphim
harmonious join!
Hallelujah!
Amen.

A NOTE FROM THE MUSIC DIRECTOR

By Leon Botstein

When tonight’s performance of one of G. F. Handel’s more famous oratorios was scheduled a year ago, the intent of the ASO was to offer a friendly and reassuring program fit for the season, but one that was not entirely conventional. Handel’s *Judas Maccabaeus* is hardly obscure though, it is not the *Messiah* in terms of frequency of performances. We, as citizens and residents of the greater New York area, home to so many American Jews, have been accustomed to linking Hannukah and Christmas as key constituents of an ecumenical “season” (as in the phrase, “Season’s Greetings”). So what better choice than a setting of the story that is the basis of the Hannukah holiday, an oratorio by a Baroque composer, a Protestant German transplanted to London and in the employ of the English monarch, the head of the Anglican Church, performed in New York City’s magnificent Baptist place of worship, Riverside Church?

The events set into motion by the horrific terrorist attack on civilians by Hamas on 7 October 2023 have not diminished the importance of ASO’s initial intent—to encourage a shared sense of humanity and friendship across religious divides. Quite the opposite. But the unanticipated context of tonight’s performance invites further reflections on Handel’s subject and his treatment of it. As the distinguished composer and musicologist Byron Adams explains in his notes to this performance, Handel’s work was written to celebrate the military victory of the English over the Scots at the Battle of Culloden in 1746. The choice of the victory of the Maccabees as symbolic of the same

divine justice in the English triumph was not only flattering to the Duke of Cumberland but also in part a gesture of gratitude to the Jewish community of London and the financial support of its banking elite to the English crown. The work’s premiere was a breakthrough in what would be a struggle for acceptance for Jews in England life, culture, and politics, one defined by only partial and hard-won victories. Historic as the premiere and subsequent popularity of this oratorio were, anti-Semitism has remained a potent presence in English culture and politics.

Consider depictions of Jews in English literature. They include the complex lead character, Shylock, in Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* as well as the sympathetic Jewish characters Isaac and Rebecca (who, out of fear of persecution in England, plan to flee to Spain) in Sir Walter Scott’s 1819 *Ivanhoe*, set in the time of the Crusades. Among the most influential English literary accounts of Jews and Judaism can be found in *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* by Edward Gibbon, which appeared between 1776 and 1781. Gibbon was ten years old when Handel’s oratorio was first performed.

In the second volume of his twelve-volume masterpiece, in chapter 15, Gibbon explored the roots of Christianity in Judaism, Christianity’s divergence from these roots, Christianity’s triumph as a universalist religion, and above all, its role in bringing the Roman Empire to its end. Gibbon’s extensive account of ancient Judaism is shaped by his reading of historical

sources but also by contemporary mid-eighteenth-century attitudes toward Jews. For Gibbon, “zealousness” is a key to understanding Jews. Despite asserting a monopoly on divine truth, they resist bringing others into their fold. Jews felt no obligation to preach the true faith of Moses to others. They were “obstinate,” and demonstrated “inflexible perseverance” when faced with the very liberal demands of Roman polytheism, rejecting any gesture of compromise to their monotheism. Jews therefore remained small in number and not suited to conquest but rather to defense. Furthermore, the “inflexible” laws of Moses Jews followed with “rigor” represented “peculiar” and “trivial” distinctions and “burdensome” observances that became “objects of disgust and aversion for the other nations, to whose habits and prejudices they were diametrically opposite.” The “dangerous” and “painful” “rite of circumcision” was, for Gibbon, the most characteristic practice of Judaism; it was repellant and communicated the exclusivity, arrogance, and illiberalism characteristic of adherents to the Jewish faith.

The Judas Maccabaeus in Handel’s oratorio does not entirely dispense with this familiar set of stereotypes, but he transcends them. He is cast as the heroic defender of the true faith, a placeholder for the contemporary need in England to defend against Catholicism and the Stuart claims on the English throne. It should be remembered that Handel’s oratorio was written several decades before the gradual legal emancipation of Jews on continental Europe and in England. In England, legal restrictions against Jews were dropped only gradually, and with stiff opposition. They were entirely abolished finally at the end of the nineteenth century. Therefore, for Jews in the European and North American diaspora,

from the mid eighteenth century through to today, Judas Maccabaeus became an aspirational symbol of the Jewish capacity to fight back against the effort to deny them civic equality, and further humiliate them and their faith by the spread of anti-Semitic myths that made their exclusion from full participation in the political life of any nation popular.

As pariahs without full legal rights, Jews were condemned to a dissonant existence; in many respects, they were free, comfortable, and engaged in the commerce of life; they were accepted in certain spheres, especially as converts to Christianity. But throughout the nineteenth century, Jews remained, as a community, powerless, contained, and vulnerable. The more they sought security by becoming exceptional Europeans—achieving great heights in the sciences, the legal and medical professions, in the arts, and in commerce, all activities dependent on learning, study, and innovation—the more remote, exotic, and appealing the Maccabees seemed. The Maccabees represented the alternative: liberation from persecution, the creation of a coherent nation of Jews who insisted on political independence and control, and therefore a normal status shared by citizens of other nations; only by becoming political equals could anti-Semitism be defeated and its legacy overcome.

With the advent of political Zionism toward the end of the nineteenth century, whether expressed in George Eliot’s 1876 *Daniel Deronda* or Theodor Herzl’s 1896 *The Jewish State*, many Jews expressed disillusionment about their chance to shed the necessity of exceptionalism and demonstrate that they were humans like everyone else in the European context. But among all Jews, including Zionists and non-Zionists,

the religious and resolutely secular, the Maccabees remained symbols of a fact obscured and denied by anti-Semitism: the notion that Jews possessed the full range of human attributes, including prowess as soldiers and equality on the playing fields, as poignantly portrayed in the 1981 film *Chariots of Fire*. Jewish sports leagues were named after the Maccabees. Spurred by the spectacle of the Dreyfus Trial, in the twentieth century, the lighting of the Hannukah menorah and its visible display communicated a sense of pride in the community, and the confidence that Jews could and would defend themselves; that they would survive the universal discrimination and persecution that haunted them. For Zionists before 1948, it expressed the hope that, in the end, Jews might have their own nation, just as all other European peoples did, and in the very place where the story of Judas Maccabee took place. For the majority, particularly in the United States, Hannukah expressed the hope that equality and justice for Jews within their home nations would be achieved.

Indeed, the many Handel oratorios based on topics from the Biblical history of Jews can be seen as a starting point of two hundred years of a history of progress in terms of co-existence, assimilation, acculturation, and efforts to end forms of intolerance and prejudice against Jews. Jews became patriots in the nations they lived in and served, for example, in the armies on both sides of World War I. Only a very small minority of them anticipated that six million civilian Jews would be slaughtered between 1939 and 1945. It is understandable but misleading to read the history of the Jews of Europe backward from the Holocaust. Its success certainly represents the victory of anti-Semitism over a reasonable expectation of progress. But one should not forget that the failure

of Europe and the United States to rescue and protect Europe’s Jews after the seizure of power by the Nazis in Germany in 1933 came as a shock to Europe’s Jews.

The establishment of a State of Israel in 1948 has changed the significance of Hannukah and the story of Judas Maccabaeus. Hannukah is a secular national holiday in Israel that celebrates the fact of the Jewish state; before 1948, in the diaspora, that possibility was only the miracle suggested by the holiday. The creation of Israel, however, has not ended anti-Semitism, as the events of recent years have shown, particularly the weeks following 7 October, in Europe and United States. Anti-Semitism possesses potency and resilience.

Consequently, tonight’s performance of Handel’s *Judas Maccabaeus* takes on special meaning. It represents the hope that art, as a dimension of culture and politics, can offer a common ground on which hatred and bigotry can be fought. The performance of a work that, brilliantly and eloquently, appropriates a biblical story and transposes it into eighteenth-century English politics, reminds us that despite differences in who we are, where we come from, and what faith we possess, we are all equal, deserving of the same rights and freedoms, and all fundamentally the same as human beings, capable of both good and evil, and rarely saints or devils. At the same time, all of us are obliged by virtue and necessity to work together on behalf of a world of peace and justice.

This sentiment seems a fitting message to be delivered through music for this holiday season. In that spirit, all of us at the American Symphony Orchestra wish each and every individual on stage and in the audience a happy and peaceful holiday season.

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

By Byron Adams, Emeritus Professor of Musicology,
University of California, Riverside

GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL

Born February 23, 1685, in Saale, Germany
Died April 14, 1759, London, United Kingdom

Judas Maccabaeus, HWV 63

Composed 1746

Premiered on April 1, 1747 at Covent Garden in London

Conducted by George Frideric Handel

Performance Time: Approximately 134 minutes

HANDEL

Seven years after Handel's death, one of his Coronation Anthems—possibly *Zadok the Priest*—was performed by a massed chorus and orchestra at the rededication of the Grand Synagogue on Duke's Place in London on August 29, 1766. The London Chronicle reported that this event was presided over by “the Chief and other eminent Rabbis belonging to the Portuguese Jewish nation” and prayers in English were offered for the Royal Family. One hundred and ten years earlier, Oliver Cromwell, the Lord Protector, who evidently believed that the English were one of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel, formally readmitted Jews into Britain, ending a banishment that began in 1290 with King Edward I's expulsion of the Jews. By the time that Handel settled in England in 1712, Jews were allowed to own property and Jewish brokers traded on the London Exchange. In

1738, the Jewish population of England numbered approximately 6000, many of whom lived in London. While antisemitism was undoubtedly woven into the fabric of eighteenth-century British life, steady if incremental progress was made toward greater legal and, to some extent, social acceptance.

Despite continuing prejudice against them, English Jews, notably the Sephardic financier Samson Gideon, evinced staunch loyalty to the Crown in 1745 by providing financial stability for both the British government and economy during the anxious weeks during which George II's son, Prince William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland, rallied the military response to a Jacobite revolt in Scotland led by the Stuart claimant to the British throne. At the start of the rebellion, Charles Edward Stuart, known as “Bonnie Prince Charlie,” and his army had won two battles. However, the Duke of Cumberland defeated the

HANDEL

Scottish troops at the Battle of Culloden on April 16, 1746; the rout was so brutal that he won the sobriquet “Butcher of Culloden.” Capitalizing upon the mood of national deliverance, Handel composed his oratorio *Judas Maccabaeus* during the summer of 1746 and premiered it to ecstatic acclaim on April 1, 1747. The librettist, Rev. Thomas Morell, recalled, “the plan of ‘Judas Maccabaeus’ was designed as a compliment to the Duke of Cumberland.”

Morell based his libretto on the story of Yehuda HaMakkabbi, a Jewish military hero whose name was Anglicized as “Judas Maccabaeus,” over the pagan Seleucid Empire. As chronicled in the Apocryphal books of First and Second Maccabees, the Seleucids were defeated after a bloody and protracted war. In 164 BCE, Judas and his forces retook Jerusalem, cleansed the temple, and rededicated the altar, events that are celebrated during the festival of Hanukkah and mentioned prominently in the oratorio. Morell and Handel created a work in three parts: after a solemn overture, the people of Israel bewail their plight, but Judas inspires them to resist. In the second part, Judas voices concern that Israelites will ascribe the initial victories to themselves rather than to God, but he rallies the people in the face of renewed danger. The final part depicts the Israelites' final victory and

the rejoicing of the people when liberty and peace are restored.

Anglican audiences of 1747 were enthralled by *Judas Maccabaeus* for reasons beyond its moving and stirring music. They identified with the Israelites, as their own Protestant “true religion” had recently been menaced by “false gods,” in this instance by the ardent Catholicism of the Stuart pretender. Handel cannily abandoned the concert subscription system for *Judas*, instead offering walk-in admittance to Covent Garden for the public, including a contingent of enthusiastic Jews. While the exact number of Jewish attendees is unknown, they certainly came back repeatedly to the six 1747 performances of *Judas*.

Subsequent remarks by Handel, reported by Morell, attest that the composer was well aware of his Jewish listeners' fondness for *Judas*. As Alexander L. Ringer, founder of the musicology department at Hebrew University of Jerusalem, observed, “The role of the Jews of London in securing ultimate victory [over Bonnie Prince Charlie]... was outstanding and universally recognized... The Jews themselves, it would seem, received ‘Judas Maccabaeus’ in precisely this spirit; for never before, indeed never again, did their attendance and enthusiastic support of a Handel work reach similar proportions.”

THE ARTISTS



Leon Botstein, Conductor
Photo by Ric Kallaher

Leon Botstein has been music director and principal conductor of the American Symphony Orchestra since 1992. He is also music director of The Orchestra Now, an innovative training orchestra composed of top musicians from around the world. He is co-artistic director of Bard SummerScape and the Bard Music Festival, which take place at the Richard B. Fisher Center for the Performing Arts at Bard College, where he has been president since 1975. He is also conductor laureate and principal guest conductor of the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra, where he served as music director from 2003–11. In 2018 he assumed artistic directorship of the Grafenegg Academy in Austria.

Mr. Botstein is also active as a guest conductor and can be heard on numerous recordings with the London Symphony (including a Grammy-nominated recording of Popov’s First Symphony), the London Philharmonic, NDR–Hamburg, and the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra. Many of his live performances with the American Symphony Orchestra are available online. His recording with the

ASO of Paul Hindemith’s *The Long Christmas Dinner* was named one of the top recordings of 2015 by several publications, and his recent recording of Gershwin piano music with the Royal Philharmonic was hailed by *The Guardian* and called “something special... in a crowded field” by *Musicweb International*. Mr. Botstein is the author of numerous articles and books, including *The Compleat Brahms* (Norton), *Jefferson’s Children* (Doubleday), *Judentum und Modernität* (Böhlau), and *Von Beethoven zu Berg* (Zsolnay). He is also the editor of *The Musical Quarterly*. For his contributions to music he has received the award of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and Harvard University’s prestigious Centennial Award, as well as the Cross of Honor, First Class from the government of Austria. Other recent awards include the Bruckner Society’s Julio Kilenyi Medal of Honor for his interpretations of that composer’s music; and the Leonard Bernstein Award for the Elevation of Music in Society. In 2011 he was inducted into the American Philosophical Society.

THE ARTISTS



Deborah Nansteel, Mezzo-Soprano
Photo by Arielle Doneson

“A formidable display of vocal power and dramatic assurance,” mezzo-soprano Deborah Nansteel is poised for international stardom, having already performed at almost all the leading opera companies in the U.S. She made her debut with the Metropolitan Opera as Alisa in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, her debut with the Lyric Opera of Chicago as Gertrude in *Roméo et Juliette*, her Carnegie Hall debut in Mozart’s Coronation Mass, and her New York Philharmonic debut alongside Eric Owens in *In Their Footsteps: Great African American Singers and Their Legacy*.

This season, Ms. Nansteel has house debuts with LA Opera as Aunt Lou in *Highway 1, USA* and The Atlanta Opera as Roßweiße in *Die Walküre*, in addition to performing the roles of Azucena in *Il trovatore* with Opera Santa Barbara and Gertrud in *Hänsel und Gretel* with Opera San Antonio. As a concert soloist, Ms. Nansteel will be seen with the Utah Symphony in performances of Beethoven’s *Symphony No. 9* and act three of *Wozzeck*, and she joins the Church of St. Ignatius Loyola for their 150th Anniversary celebration of Verdi’s *Requiem*.

William Guanbo Su makes his American Symphony Orchestra debut in this performance. Also this season, he returns to the Metropolitan Opera (Speaker in *The Magic Flute*) and Houston Grand Opera (Bonze in *Madama Butterfly*). He also makes debuts with Seattle Opera (Basilio in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*), Santa Fe Opera (Masetto in *Don Giovanni*), and Utah Opera (Colline in *La bohème*). Last season, he returned to the Metropolitan Opera (Speaker in *The Magic Flute*), Austin Opera (Basilio in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*), Houston Grand Opera (First Nazarene in *Salome*), and Opera Theatre of Saint Louis (Blitch in *Susannah*), as well as debuted with Boston Lyric Opera (Colline in *La bohème*) and the Grand Teton Music Festival (Bonze in *Madama Butterfly*).

Mr. Su made his Metropolitan Opera debut as the Jailer in *Tosca* after first singing that role, as well as Angelotti, with Austin Opera. With Aspen Music Festival, he sang Basilio in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, Sarastro in *Die Zauberflöte*, and Garibaldo in *Rodelinda* and at the Festival d’Aix-en-Provence, and sang the Demon in Pergolesi’s *Li prodigi della divina grazia nella conversione e morte di San Guglielmo Duca di Aquitana* with Les Talen Lyriques. He is an alumnus of the Houston Grand Opera Studio where his performances included Zuniga in *Carmen* and roles in *Dialogues des Carmélites*, *Die Zauberflöte*, and *Roméo et Juliette*. He joined the Cecilia Chorus of New York singing Bach’s Christmas Oratorio and Handel’s *Messiah*.

William Guanbo Su appears courtesy of the Metropolitan Opera.

THE ARTISTS



Brandie Sutton, Soprano
Photo by Roy Cox

Versatile, dynamic, and mesmerizing, soprano Brandie Sutton has performed with the National Symphony Orchestra, Royal Danish Symphony Orchestra, the Radio Orpheus Symphony Orchestra in Moscow, and the Krasnoyarsk Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra, among others, and has appeared on opera stages such as New York City Opera, Semperoper Dresden, Palacio de Bellas Artes, Hamburgische Staatsoper, Grand Théâtre de Genève, Alte Oper Frankfurt, Theater an der Wien, and Metropolitan Opera. Dedicated to social justice, Ms. Sutton has participated in events with the Equal Justice Initiative, such as the opening of the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama, and its 30th anniversary festivities.

Recent engagements have included *Carmina Burana* with Opera Philadelphia, her first Violetta in *La Traviata* with Virginia Opera, and Zerbinetta in *Ariadne auf Naxos* with Lakes Area Music Festival. In early 2025, Brandie will sing the Four Heroines in *The Tales of Hoffmann* with Palm Beach Opera and return to the Metropolitan Opera for their production of John Adams' *El Nino*.



Jack Swanson, Tenor
Photo by Lily Lancaster

Stillwater, Minnesota native Jack Swanson is quickly becoming one of the most sought-after young tenors in the opera world. His distinctive high lyric voice is known for singing the acrobatic arias of Rossini and the legato melodies of Donizetti.

This season Mr. Swanson makes some much-anticipated debuts with the Lyric Opera of Chicago as Don Ramiro in *La Cenerentola*, with the Houston Grand Opera as Fenton in *Falstaff* and returns to the Norwegian Opera for Ferrando in *Così Fan Tutte* and Don Ramiro in *La Cenerentola*, as well as to the Rossini Opera Festival in Pesaro for his signature role of Almaviva in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*. Mr. Swanson can also be heard in recital in Montreal and with the Sag Harbor Song Festival. Future engagements include debuts with the Metropolitan Opera and Staatsoper Hamburg and returns to the Rossini Opera Festival in Pesaro and the Houston Grand Opera, all in leading roles.

Last season Mr. Swanson premiered the title-role in Paola Prestini's *Edward Tulane* with the Minnesota Opera, and made debuts with the Austin Opera as Almaviva in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, the Utah Opera as Tonio in *La fille du régiment* (a role debut, as well), the Atlanta Opera as the title role in *Candide*, and Opera Maine for Don Ramiro in *La Cenerentola*. In concert the tenor joined the Utah Symphony for *Carmina Burana*, the Mercury Chamber Orchestra in Houston for the tenor solo in Handel's *Messiah* and performed in *recital* with Matinee musicale in Duluth, MN.

THE ARTISTS

Bard Festival Choral

The Bard Festival Choral was formed in 2003 as the resident choir of the Bard Music Festival. It consists of the finest ensemble singers from New York City and surrounding areas. Many of its members have distinguished careers as soloists and as performers in a variety of choral groups; all possess a shared enthusiasm for the exploration of new and unfamiliar music.

The Riverside Choir

The Riverside Choir sings every Sunday morning September–June, and at other special services through the year. The choir sings the full range of choral repertoire from classical composers such as Mendelssohn, Handel, and Howells, to American composers and spirituals.

James Bagwell, Music Director of the Bard Festival Choral

James Bagwell maintains an active international schedule as a conductor of choral, operatic, and orchestral music. He was most recently named associate conductor of The Orchestra Now (TÖN) and in 2009 was appointed principal guest conductor of the American Symphony Orchestra, leading them in concerts at both Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center. From 2009–15 he served as music director of The Collegiate Choral, with whom he conducted a number of rarely-performed operas-in-concert at Carnegie Hall, including Bellini's *Beatrice di Tenda*, Rossini's *Möise et Pharaon*, and Boito's *Meisfofele*. He conducted the New York premiere of Philip Glass's *Toltec Symphony* and Golijov's *Oceana*, both at Carnegie Hall. His performance of Kurt Weill's *Knickerbocker Holiday* at Alice Tully Hall was recorded live for Gaslight Records and is the only complete recording of this musical. Since 2011 he has collaborated with singer and composer Natalie Merchant, conducting a number of major orchestras across the country, including the San Francisco and Seattle Symphonies.

Mr. Bagwell has trained choruses for a number of major American and international orchestras, including the New York Philharmonic; Los Angeles Philharmonic; San Francisco, NHK (Japan), and St. Petersburg Symphonies; and the Budapest Festival, Mostly Mozart Festival, American Symphony, Cincinnati Symphony, Cincinnati Pops, and Indianapolis Symphony Orchestras. Since 2003 he has been Director of Choruses for the Bard Music Festival, conducting and preparing choral works during the summer festival at The Richard B. Fisher Center for the Performing Arts at Bard College.

He conducted some twenty-five productions as music director of Light Opera Oklahoma. At Bard SummerScape he has lead various theatrical works, most notably *The Tender Land*, which received glowing praise from *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, and *Opera News*. From 2005–10 he was Music Director of The Dessoff Choirs in New York, who under his leadership made numerous appearances at Carnegie Hall in addition to their regular season.

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