



Composers

Bach - Handel - Purcell

Sheet 4

Name

George Frideric Handel - 1685 - 1759

his early years

George Frideric Handel was born about a month before Johann Sebastian Bach and would have been playing children's games around his home in Halle, Germany at the same time that Sebastian was playing in his home town, Eisenach, which was not all that far away. There were a lot of musicians in Halle, so it would not have been uncommon for a young boy to take an interest in music. George loved to watch the musicians play. He especially liked to watch the horn players on the bridges over the rivers.

His father, however, did not want him to grow up to be a musician and insisted on him studying law instead. George's family were hard workers and had little time for music. George's father, also called George Handel, was a surgeon and because of this he knew the Duke of Saxony. At one meeting the Duke heard George playing the organ and said that he would provide him with lessons. His father gave his permission and George became so good at playing the organ that he became the assistant organist at the church when he was just twelve years old.

Sadly, at this time George's father died. In his grief George wrote a poem to remember him by. Because he was very concerned about obeying his father's wishes George decided to go to school and study law. However, his heart was not in it. He was so much drawn to music that he did not finish his studies. At that time a position became vacant as organist at a Cathedral. He applied for it and was accepted. When George turned eighteen he moved to Hamburg, which is a big city. In Hamburg George became a violinist at the German Opera House. By now he had learned to play the organ, the harpsichord, the violin and the oboe. He was drawn to the horn players and of these George liked the oboe the best. He was hard working and ambitious, always looking for ways to improve his music and interested in meeting people who could help him in his career. He also began to think about travelling to other countries.

Can you answer these questions?

What was the name of the town where George was born?

Which other composer was born in the same year?.....

What did George's father want him to study?

Who organised music lessons for George?

What major decision did George make when he was 18?.....

How old was he when his father died?

Name three instruments that he could play?

True or False	
George Handel was born in Hamburg	He liked watching the horn players
He studied law	His father wanted him to be a musician.
He was taught to play the organ	Handel played a violin at church
	He was offered a job as an organist



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Sheet 5

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his later years

George Handel wanted to travel and expand his musical career. In When he was 22 he decided to visit Italy, where he learnt a lot about their style, which he liked and used in his own music as well. He spent time at Florence, Rome and Naples and while he was there he wrote a lot of music, including operas, oratorios and cantatas. The last opera that he wrote in Italy was 'Agrippina,' which he wrote in 1709 in Venice. It was a huge success.

The following year he returned to Germany to become the court composer and conductor for the Elector of Hanover, but he soon wanted to travel again and by the end of the year he left for London, where he found more success with his new opera, 'Rinaldo.'

When he went back to Germany, he asked permission for a short trip back to London, which was granted. He never returned from that trip but made his home in London permanently.

London was an exciting place, which had just been rebuilt after the disastrous Fire of London, which lasted for five days and burnt down most of the old buildings.

Handel became very popular in England. Queen Anne, the Queen of England at the time, liked him very much. After he wrote a piece of music called 'Birthday Ode' for her she was so happy she said she would pay him two hundred pounds a year for the rest of his life.

In 1719 Handel started the Royal Academy of Music where he presented some of his greatest operas over the next ten years. He had many successes and a few failures but he was a popular person and was happy in London. Handel became a naturalized British subject in 1727.

As well as operas, Handel wrote music for national celebrations. One of his most famous pieces was the 'Water Music' which he wrote for the King to listen to as he sailed down the Thames River.

He was later appointed composer to the Chapel Royal by the King. It was around this time that he composed one of his greatest and most well known oratorios, 'The Messiah.' This work is performed by many choirs today at Christmas time.

Can you answer these questions?

Name two places that Handel visited in Italy.

Name an opera that he wrote while in Italy.

How long did he stay in Italy?

Where was he when he wrote 'Rinaldo'?

What major project did he undertake in 1719?.....

Who did he write 'Birthday Ode' for?

Name two other pieces that he wrote.

True or False	
Handel wrote 'Agrippina' in Italy	Queen Anne liked his music.
He lived in Hamburg most of his life.	He wrote music for celebrations.
He was in the Fire of London	He became composer to the Chapel Royal
	He died in Germany