**Acknowledgements**

We wish to express our profound gratitude to Corpus Christi Catholic Church for hosting this performance. Special thanks go to Fr. Jerry Volz, pastor, and to Shaun Whisler, Director of Music at Corpus Christi. We also owe a special debt of thanks to Audrey Pickering and Edward Poston, two outstanding graduate teaching assistants in the KU School of Music, who accompanied choral rehearsals and helped administer this production of the *Messiah.* Many other people have helped with publicity, and physical set up for the concert. We appreciate all of the efforts that have been made on our behalf.

**Conductor**

A person in a black shirt

Description automatically generated

Cory S. Reames is an active choral conductor, early music specialist, and vocal soloist based in Kansas City, MO. He is currently enrolled in a doctoral program at Kansas University in the Organ and Church Music area. In 2016, Cory founded the Missouri Oratorio Society, a nonprofit choral ensemble that presents sacred musical dramas featuring local professional and experienced amateur singers. The Oratorio Society performed Messiah (2016, 2017) and Elijah (2018) at the historic Stone Church in Independence, Missouri. In 2019, Cory proudly served as co-conductor in collaboration with Steve Lewis in the KU Medical Arts Symphony’s presentation of C.P.E. Bach’s Magnificat. Cory is the Director of Music at Grace Episcopal Church in Liberty, Missouri where he conducts both the adult and youth choirs during worship and Evensong services. He previously served in the same capacity at Kansas City United Church of Christ in Brookside. In addition to his work in church music, Cory is the Development Coordinator for Metro Lutheran Ministry in Kansas City. Cory holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Music History from William Jewell College and a Master of Music degree in Choral Conducting and Musicology from the University of Kansas.

**The Bales Choral Society**

The Bales Choral Society was formed in the fall of 2024. It is a chorus drawn from faculty and staff members across the KU campus. The Bales Chorale is a student choral ensemble in the KU School of Music that sings for graduate choral recitals in the Organ and Church Music area. For the 2024-25 academic year these two ensembles are singing together.

**Soloists**

**Stella Markou, soprano**



Stella Markou

*D.M.A University of Arizona; M.M. Cleveland Institute of Music; B.A. Oberlin Conservatory of Music*

Hailed as ‘exquisite’ by Gramophone, Greek-American soprano Stella Markou has performed internationally as a soloist in oratorio, opera, and on the concert stage. She has been a featured guest artist with the Edinburgh Contemporary Musical Ensemble, The Consulate General of Greece, Union Avenue Opera, Masterworks Chorale, Nassau Music Society, Dance New Amsterdam Company, American Chamber Chorale, University of Nevada Las Vegas Concert Series, Ambassadors of Harmony, and the Nashville Ballet.

A passionate performer of contemporary music, her festival work includes the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, Heidelberg New Music Festival, International Computer Music Conference, Paros Parks Festival, Naxos Music Festival, Siletz Bay Music Festival, Electronic Music Midwest, Xortos Music Festival, and the Society for Electro-Acoustic Music (SEAMUS).

Her stage performances include roles in *Pique Dame, Die Zauberflöte, The Turn of the Screw, The Mikado, The Telephone,*and*The Songstress*, among others. She has also been a featured soloist in several masterworks, including Orff's *Carmina Burana,* Fauré's*Requiem,* Haydn’s*Lord Nelson's Mass,*Brahms’*Ein deutsches Requiem,*Handel’s *Messiah,*Poulenc’s *Gloria,*Mozart's*Requiem,*Rutter'*s Gloria,* and Bach’s *Jauchzet Gott in allen landen.*

Dr. Markou’s previous appointments were as Director of Vocal Studies and Opera Theatre at the University of Missouri-St. Louis and teaching artist for Opera Theatre of St. Louis’ Artist in Training Program. During her tenure at the University of Missouri-St. Louis she built an opera program from the ground up, producing/directing/designing fifteen years of opera scenes and fully staged productions. Her directorial work in opera and in musical theater have garnered numerous national recognitions. Her opera productions of *The Clever Artifice of Harriet and Margaret* and *The Pirates of Penzance* won first prize in the National Opera Association’s opera production competition, and her production of *The Medium* won first prize in The American Prize opera production competition.

**Courtney Fletcher, Mezzo-Soprano**

A person smiling at camera

Description automatically generated

Known for her “smooth” and “seamless” voice (Bay View Music Association) and her “razor-sharp comedic chops” (Ned Canty- Opera Memphis), Dr. Courtney J. Fletcher is a sought-after performer and teacher of the vocal arts.

Her 2022 performance highlights include Mozart’s Requiem (Memphis Symphony Orchestra and Rhodes College),  Beethoven’s 9th Symphony (New West Symphony), Dorabella in Così fan tutte (Opera Memphis) and traveling to Prague, Czech Republic, as a participant in Opernfest Prague, where she sang with Prague’s National Theatre Orchestra. Her operatic roles span all musical eras and include Laurene Powell Jobs (The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs), Dorabella (Così fan tutte), Lazuli (L'Étoile),and Angelina (La Cenerentola), Bertarido (Rodelinda), Paula (Florencia en el Amazonas), Jade Boucher (Dead Man Walking), and Kate Pinkerton (Madama Butterfly). She is an avid supporter of newly-composed music and has sung in premieres and workshops by Grammy Award-winning composers Terence Blanchard and Tobias Picker, Robert Patterson, Shulamit Ran, and Matthew Recio.

She was a Gerdine Young Artist at Opera Theatre of Saint Louis for the 2017 & 2018 season.​ Select awards include National Opera Association’s Carolyn Bailey and Dominick Argento Vocal Competition (Artistic Division - Winner), Houston Saengerbund Competition (3rd Place), and MONC Auditions (now Laffont Competition- District Winner).

Her concert work includes I Am Carmen Miranda (Roberto Sierra) with Oberlin Conservatory's New Music Ensemble, Fern Hill (John Corigliano), Serenade to Music (R. Vaughan Williams), Messiah and Alexander’s Feast (G. F. Handel) and Folk Songs (Bernard Rand) with the IU New Music Ensemble. This fall, she will be the Alto Soloist for Handel’s Messiah with the Boise Philharmonic Orchestra.

As an instructor, Dr. Fletcher teaches classical, musical theater, jazz, pop, and folk singers of all ages. She worked as an Applied Faculty member at Rhodes College from 2021-2023, where she taught voice, music theory, and opera. In 2022, she was also chosen as one of twelve young teachers from across the United States and Canada to participate in the National Association of Teachers of Singing Intern Program.

Dr. Fletcher graduated from Indiana University’s Jacobs School of Music with a Doctor of Music in Voice degree with a minor in Music Theory, where she studied with Professor Emerita Mary Ann Hart.

courtney fletcher

**Zachary Devin, Tenor**



Zachary Devin’s voice has been praised as “superb, strong, and impassioned” by Opera Today. He will receive his Ph.D. in Vocal Pedagogy from the University of Kansas, where he served as a teaching assistant in both the School of Music and the Speech, Language, and Hearing departments. He also holds an undergraduate degree from Millikin University and graduate degrees from Rice University and the Royal Academy of Music in London.

Before joining the faculty at KU, he taught applied voice at the University of Missouri Saint Louis, Ottawa University, Lindenwood University, and St. Charles Community College. He has also taught vocal and choral pedagogy courses, choral conducting, lyric diction, speech anatomy, and speech physics.

At KU, Zachary teaches applied voice, vocal pedagogy, and diction. As a researcher, he has presented at national and international conferences for associations such as the Voice Foundation, the National Association for Music Educators, and the Kansas Music Educators Association. His research interests include vocal fatigue in collegiate singers, vocal health, vocal warm-ups, vocal function exercises, and vocal pedagogy applications.

**Gabe Lewis O’Connor, Bass**

A person in a suit and tie

Description automatically generated

Gabe Lewis-O’Connor balances a busy schedule as conductor, professional soloist and choral performer, daily meditator, amateur woodworker, avid bread-baker, slow long-distance runner, father, and husband. Striving to bring humor, authenticity, and emotion to all these passions is a lifelong pursuit. Prior to his masters and doctoral studies in conducting at the University of Missouri-Kansas City Gabe sang for four years with the professional vocal ensemble Chanticleer, which crystalized his belief that relationships are the core of powerful music-making. Gabe received a bachelor’s degree in vocal performance from Lawrence University in Appleton, Wisconsin and hails from Lawrence, Kansas, where he now lives with his wife Lauren, their sporty son Eamon and fierce daughter Celia. Gabe is honored to serve as Artistic Director for the Lawrence Children’s Choir and Interim Associate Director of Choral Studies at the University of Kansas School of Music.

**Program Notes**

Handel’s *Messiah* is one of the iconic pieces of music in the Western tradition. Indeed, it would be hard to name another piece of music that is so beloved by the general public. Annual performances take place all over the world. No other piece of classical music has spawned such a following. This makes it easy to forget that Handel’s masterpiece stands in both a musical and a dramatic tradition.

First of all, it is an oratorio. This form originated in Italy in the late 16th century The word “oratorio” is not easily defined. It is a dramatic piece, much like opera, but it generally avoids some of the standard conventions of opera like costumes and acting. Oratorios are usually written for soloists, chorus, and orchestra. Whereas opera often focused on mythological figures, oratorio generally engaged in telling stories about sacred subjects drawn especially from the Old Testament, the Apocrypha, and the lives of the saints. The term “oratorio” refers to the setting in which these dramatic works were performed – the “oratory”– buildings meant to foster prayer and devotion. Giacomo Carissimi was the great early Italian master of oratorios. *Jephte* was perhaps his most well-known work in this new genre. Eventually oratorio spread from Italy to Austria, Germany, and England.

We associate Handel with the *Messiah* so much that we forget that Handel was actually a German composer. He worked in the Hamburg opera before making a sojourn to Italy where he lived from 1706-1710, writing secular Italian cantatas and two operas. After this sojourn in Italy, Handel gradually made his way to England, the country he would call home for the rest of his life. He began his career in England by composing Italian operas, but over time public taste shifted and English language librettos became more popular. By 1741 he had turned his attention to oratorios. The *Messiah* was his sixth venture into this new genre. He wrote the work in 24 days during the late summer of 1741. This pace of composition was not usual for him. He wrote other oratorios in similar time frames, often in summer. He set the piece to a libretto written by his colleague and friend Charles Jennens. The *Messiah* and *Israel in Egypt* are the only Handel oratorios whose entire text was essentially drawn from the Bible.

The first performance was in Dublin on April 13th, 1742, and it was a charity event. Handel was allowed to use the 16 men and 16 boys from the cathedral choirs of St. Patrick’s and Christ Church. Roughly 700 people came to hear the premiere of the work. They raised enough money to pay for the release of 142 people from debtor’s prison.

The oratorio itself is in three parts. This echoes the standard three acts in many of Handel’s operas. Part of the explanation of Handel’s ability to write the oratorio in such a short time span was the fact that he borrowed liberally from himself. “O Death, where is thy sting?"; "His yoke is easy,” "And he shall purify", “For unto us a child is born" and "All we like sheep" were all borrowed from other pieces that Handel had composed earlier.

Jennings and Handel took a general structural approach to their setting of *Messiah.* Part 1 opens with an instrumental “symphony.” In the middle of the 18 movements of this part there is another instrumental movement called a “Pifa” or “pastoral symphony.” These two movements provide a frame for the remainder of Part 1. The other movements are developed in a special order, often starting with a recitative or a slow vocal movement followed by a quicker aria, and culminating with a chorus.

At the end of Part 1 tonight, we are going to take some artistic license and add one more movement: the famous *Hallelujah Chorus*, which actually appears at the end of part 2. Feel free to stand, pull up the score to the *Hallelujah Chorus* from the QR code on your program andsing along with all of us as we celebrate this exciting conclusion to our evening concert.

Please come back in the spring and join us for a performance of parts II and III. Dates TBA.

Michael Bauer

Director, Bales Choral Society