

## HANDEL'S MESSIAH: "THE GREAT STORY EVER TOLD..."

Jacksonville, FL (December 5, 2018) --- The annual performance of George Frideric Handel's *Messiah* will take place on December 15 & 16. The concerts will feature four guest artists and the Jacksonville Symphony Chorus.

**WHAT:** Handel's *Messiah* is thought to be "the greatest story ever told... the most majestic music ever conceived." The Jacksonville Symphony and Symphony Chorus present music's most powerful message of faith in THE *Messiah* of the season.

**WHEN:**

- Saturday, December 15 at 8 p.m.
- Sunday, December 16 at 3 p.m.
- (The Jacksonville Symphony's *First Coast Nutcracker* will be going on the same weekend)

**WHERE:** All performances will take place in the Times-Union Center for the Performing Arts in Jacoby Symphony Hall.

**WHO:** Jacksonville Symphony Associate Conductor **Nathan Aspinall** will lead both performances of *Messiah*. Recent performances of Aspinall's have included Handel's *Messiah*, Prokofiev's *Cinderella* and a *Masterworks Series* concert with organist Cameron Carpenter. Formerly, he held the position of young conductor with the Queensland Symphony Orchestra where he assisted Chief Conductor Johannes Fritzsich and visiting guest conductors and conducted concerts for the education series. Aspinall studied French horn and Conducting at the University of Queensland and upon graduation was awarded the Hugh Brandon Prize.

The **Jacksonville Symphony Chorus**, under the direction of **Donald McCullough**, is an all-volunteer group of individuals from all walks of life who have a love of singing choral music. The 100 members must audition to participate.

In 2014 the Chorus traveled to New York City for perform under McCullough's direction in the Lincoln Center premiere of his cantata *In the Shadow of the Holocaust*. This season the chorus will participate in several performances including *A French Fantasy*, *Daphnis and Chloe* and *Verdi's Requiem*.

**GUEST ARTISTS:** Joining the Symphony and the Chorus will be four guest vocalists.

American soprano **Emily Birsan** is a critically acclaimed recitalist and well known for her prominent interpretations of concert and operatic repertoire.

The 2017-2018 season included a concert performance with the Liverpool Symphony, Violetta in *La traviata* with Indianapolis Opera, Handel's *Messiah* with the Jacksonville Symphony, Mahler's Fourth Symphony with the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra and her debut with Welsh National Opera as Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni*. In the 2016-2017 season, Birsan made role debuts as Juliette in Gounod's *Romeo et Juliette* with Madison Opera, Susanna in *Le nozze di Figaro* with Boston Lyric Opera and Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni* with Florentine Opera.

American mezzo-soprano **Amanda Crider** is quickly gaining recognition for her extraordinary musicality and assured dramatic presence. Engagements for 2017-2018 included Alma in *Persona* with LA Opera, Handel's *Messiah* with the Jacksonville Symphony, Angelina in *La Cenerentola* with Opera

Orlando, Speranza in *L'Orfeo* with Apollo's Fire and the title role in *Carmen* with Pine Mountain Music Festival.

This season, American tenor **Jonathan Johnson** makes his debut in the title role of *Candide* with the Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra, Utah Symphony Orchestra and Des Moines Metro Opera and returns to the Lyric Opera of Chicago as Lurcanio in *Ariodante*. He also returns to Jacksonville Symphony as Don Ottavio in *Don Giovanni* and as the tenor soloist in *Messiah*, which he also performs with Kansas City Symphony Orchestra.

British-Canadian baritone **Alexander Dobson** has been praised for his musical and dramatic artistry on both opera and concert stages. He was lauded for his “gripping embodiment of Wozzeck” (*Journal Voir*) in a production of the Berg opera with Théâtre du Nouveau Monde and Orchestre Métropolitain, conducted by Yannick Nézet-Séguin.

This season Dobson makes his third appearance in three seasons with Florentine Opera, performing the role of Betteron in Carlise Floyd's *Prince of Players*. Concert highlights include *Messiah* performances with Symphony Nova Scotia and St. Thomas Church in New York as well as Duruflé's *Requiem* with the Bach Society of St. Louis and Bizet's *Carmen* in concert with the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony.

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The Jacksonville Symphony is North Florida's leading music nonprofit offering live performances at Jacoby Hall in the Times-Union Center for the Performing Arts and other venues throughout the area. In addition, the Symphony provides music instruction for youth and operates the Jacksonville Symphony Youth Orchestras. For more information about the Symphony, visit [JaxSymphony.org](http://JaxSymphony.org), like them at [facebook.com/JaxSymphony](https://facebook.com/JaxSymphony), follow them on @jaxsymphony, on Instagram at JaxSymphony and on YouTube at JacksonvilleSymphony.