

## WHO was JUDAS MACCABEUS?? The Tale behind G.F. Handel's Great Oratorio. G.F. Handel is most revered for his famous *Messiah* however in his time, he was very well known for another oratorio, *Judas Maccabeus*, which was written by Handel in 1746.

**The History:** The historical events leading up to the action in *Judas Maccabeus* provide the context for this epic tale.

After the death of Alexander the Great (323 B.C.), his empire was divided into Ptolemaic and Seleucid kingdoms, both which had territory within the eastern Mediterranean. By 198 B.C. the area had fallen to the Syrians under Antiochus. Initially the Jews were treated well, but later, under Antiochus IV (Antiochus Epiphanes), their religion and way of life became

threatened as he imposed Hellenism, the Greek religion and culture, on his empire. What followed has become known as the Maccabean revolt, and was led initially by Mattathias, a priest from rural Modiin. It was continued by his sons John, Simon, Judas Maccabeus, Eleazar and Jonathan after Mattathias's death (166 B.C.).

**The Oratorio:** Part 1 begins with mourning over the death of Mattathias. Judas Maccabeus is then appointed leader of the Jewish people, and he rallies his people to put their trust in God and to fight for their traditions. Part 2 begins with celebration of success in battle under Judas, and then moves to despair as another war with a stronger army is anticipated. Judas again rallies the people to go to battle. Part 2 ends with the vows of the Israelites to worship God alone and not worship idols. In Part 3 the Israelites celebrate a feast of Thanksgiving after the Temple has been restored and the rights of the Israelites to their religion and laws had been reestablished. This feast, which featured the lighting of lamps, became known as the Feast of Lights, the basis of Hanukkah. Into this feast Judas Maccabeus returns after a final victory: "See, the conquering hero comes" is probably the most famous chorus from this oratorio. The Israelites pay tribute to God, and the oratorio ends in a spirit of joy with a rousing Hallelujah Chorus.

**Masterworks of Oakville** will perform *Judas Maccabeus* on Friday November 21 and Saturday November 22, 2009 8:00pm at St. Andrews Church, 47 Reynolds St. Oakville. It is a wonderful and dramatic tale set to music that compares with the *Messiah*, and you do not want to miss it! Tickets are available at Atelier Grigorian, Bookers, Leslie Music and Notes Music in Oakville (\$25/\$23/\$20).

History and description is based on the notes from the score - Novello & Co. Ltd. edition.