



Handel & Haydn Society Orchestra and Chorus (@James Doyle) ↻

## 200 Years and Counting with Handel & Haydn Society

By **Cheryl Fenton** (*/users/cheryl-fenton*) (*/user/*) on 07/18/14

Cover bands have their place in the world, but there's definitely something electrifying about hearing a musical selection in its purest original state. It's magical when the textures, sounds and nuances all come together as intended upon composure.

Boston's **Handel & Haydn Society** (<http://handelandhaydn.org/>), lovingly called H&H, is as close as we can get to hearing 17th and 18th century composers unveil their own masterpieces. Think woodwinds made of wood not metal or plastic, brass instruments sans valves, and smaller-sized orchestras and choruses. Piano gives way to the harpsichord, while classic violins sit aside the

long-necked theorbo.

Relying on period instruments for authentic sound, this world-class orchestra and professional chorus turns 200 years old with its 2014-2015 season. The excitement surrounding its bicentennial is palpable.

“This is not antique music,” says Harry Christophers, in his sixth season as the Society’s Artistic Director. “This is music for everyone. By ensuring vibrant performances that ignite the listener, we attract audiences of all ages. We make the great music of the Baroque and Classical eras sound fresh, new and invigorating. What we will continue to do is strip the cobwebs off it all and make it immediate and exciting.”

Eponymous with two giants of the past, H&H is no stranger to building (and delivering) excitement for some of the world’s greatest choral masterworks. As the country’s oldest continuously performing arts organization, it has introduced many of the greatest pieces to America—Handel’s Messiah, Haydn’s The Creation and Bach’s St. Matthew Passion. It also gave Boston its initial listen to Beethoven’s Symphony No. 9 and Mendelssohn’s Elijah. Yes, a lot has happened since that first concert in 1815.



↑ Harry Christophers, Handel & Haydn Society artistic director (©Stu Rosner)

## **Staying HIP**

H&H began its tradition of Historically Informed Performance (HIP) in 1989, when former artistic director Christopher Hogwood became inspired by vocal and instrumental authenticity. Since then, the Society has become one of the nation's foremost period orchestras.

“Period music-making is relatively new, born out of a movement that was started seriously barely 40 years ago,” says Christophers. “What it has done has been simply infectious. The music now begins to leap off the page and inspires everyone.”

Through HIP, audiences explore unique dynamics afforded by period instruments and orchestras.

## **The Season's Highlights**

Beginning fall 2014 and lasting through 2015, H&H's Bicentennial celebrates music that embodies the cultural heritage of Boston and the nation. Consider this a lesson in favorites that never go out of style.

Grandeur and high energy begin the yearlong revelry with a kickoff concert overflowing with Baroque style. H&H musicians display their talent to the fullest as Christophers leads orchestral and choral selections such as Handel's Music for the Royal Fireworks and Vivaldi "Summer" from The Four Seasons. Throughout the season, enthusiasts will also enjoy H&H's 400th performance of Handel's popular oratorio Messiah, Mendelssohn's Elijah and Haydn's The Creation (first performed in this country by H&H in 1819).

“Fantastic soloists will light up the concert platform,” says Christophers. “Then there's the greatest work ever written, Bach's St. Matthew Passion.” H&H premiered it in the U.S. in 1879. “For it, we will fill Symphony Hall stage with two resplendent orchestras, our vibrant chorus alongside our youth choirs, and six stylish, personable, yet dramatic soloists. We have a wealth of great music, and if you have never experienced the likes of Haydn's symphony nicknamed The Hen or Tartini's Devil's Trill, now is the time to dabble in our world.”

Birthday festivities continue, with free outdoor performances, exhibits, lectures and more. On March 24, 2015, H&H opens an interactive exhibit at the Boston Public Library in Copley Square exploring H&H's history and its relations to America's classical music movements throughout the centuries. On July 26, 2015, H&H will present a free outdoor performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony in Copley Square as part of Summer Arts Weekend. There are also the fall 2014 releases of a new Messiah CD and a commemorative book tracing H&H from its first concert at Boston's King's Chapel to today's ensemble.

“These special events will tell the H&H story to new audiences in new places,” says Christophers. “They will bring to life the history of the organization and its connection to Boston.”

“This bicentennial celebration isn't for us,” he continues. “It's a celebration of and for the people of Boston, so we plan to have some fun.”

*Check out the 2014-2015 anniversary season schedule, **here***  
(<http://handelandhaydn.org/concerts/2014-2015/>) .