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Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

Messiah

Wiener Konzerthaus, 27.04.2026 [ENA]

At the Wiener Konzerthaus, Bachgemeinde Wien's presentation of Georg Friedrich Händel's Messiah promises an evening of uncommon stylistic refinement and musical conviction. In the Mozart-Saal, this oratorio belongs exactly where it should: in a space that encourages clarity of line, eloquence of text, and a devotional intensity that never turns heavy or overwrought. With the BAchCHorWien, the Wiener Bachsolisten, soloists Anita Vozsech, Monika Schwabegger, Mario Lerchenberger, Philipp Schöllhorn, and conductor Ernst Wedam, the performance combines historical awareness with living expressive force.

What makes this reading of Messiah so attractive is its balance between grandeur and transparency. Händel's score can easily become either too monumental or too polite, but here the emphasis is on rhetorical fluency and spiritual intensity. That is the right approach, because Messiah is not an opera in disguise; it is a work of meditation, proclamation, and collective affirmation. The most affecting performances understand that its power lies in accumulation: one chorus leads to another, one aria illuminates the next, and the emotional arc grows from textual meaning rather than external display. The result is music that feels at once ceremonial and intimate.

The use of historical instruments is especially important. It gives the orchestral textures a lean, incisive vitality that suits Händel's language beautifully. Rather than creating a lush Romantic wash, the ensemble preserves the rhythmic bite, harmonic spring, and glowing contrast of Baroque sound. In the Mozart-Saal, that kind of articulation is ideal, because the hall rewards detail and balance. The Wiener Bachsolisten bring precisely the kind of playing one hopes for in this repertory: alert, flexible, and elegantly phrased.

The chorus, the BAchCHorWien, is clearly the heart of the enterprise. Bachgemeinde Wien has long been devoted to the cultivation of great sacred music, and the choir's commitment to the style is audible in the discipline of the choral sound and the seriousness of its musical purpose. In Messiah, the chorus is not merely an ensemble of voices; it is the dramatic and spiritual engine of the work. The great choruses require precision, textual unanimity, and the capacity to move from majesty to joy in an instant. This is where the performance can truly shine, because Händel's choral writing rewards singers who understand both its architecture and its exuberance.

The soloists are equally well chosen for the score's expressive demands. Anita Vozsech brings the soprano line a quality of brightness and poise that suits Händel's radiant pages. Monika Schwabegger offers the alto

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role warmth and seriousness, which are essential in music that must speak both consolingly and nobly. Mario Lerchenberger and Philipp Schöllhorn should provide the tenor and bass lines with clarity of diction and rhetorical directness, qualities that matter deeply in a work where the text is inseparable from the musical meaning.

Conducting such a score is always a question of proportion. If the performance is too fast, the music loses gravity; too slow, and it risks becoming static. Ernst Wedam appears ideally positioned to keep the line moving while preserving ceremonial weight. That kind of musical leadership is especially important in a concert given by Bachgemeinde Wien, an organization with a long tradition of cultivating Bach and related repertory in Vienna. The historical lineage matters here, but so does freshness: the best performances in this tradition make old music sound newly necessary.

What makes this concert especially appealing is that it offers more than a polished account of a beloved masterpiece. It promises a living encounter with the score's moral and spiritual imagination. Messiah remains one of the great works of Western sacred music because it speaks with directness, confidence, and warmth. In the hands of these performers, it is likely to sound not archival but immediate, not monumental for its own sake but human in scale and luminous in effect.

At its best, this is the kind of performance that reminds us why Händel's oratorio has endured: it joins rhetorical brilliance to emotional generosity. In Vienna's Mozart-Saal, with attentive performers and a historically informed approach, Messiah can become something rare — not merely an admired classic, but an experience of uplift, radiance, and communal musical truth.

Bericht online lesen: https://www.en-a.eu/kunst_kultur_und_musik/messiah-93517/

Redaktion und Verantwortlichkeit:
V.i.S.d.P. und gem. § 6 MDStV: Dr. Nadejda Komendantova

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