

PRESS RELEASE

20 November 2009

For immediate release



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Handel's Hallelujah hits £10K for heart charity

To resounding cheers from a capacity crowd at the **Royal Albert Hall** on Sunday 15 November, an anonymous benefactor bid £10,000 for the privilege of conducting **Handel's Hallelujah Chorus**, only to waive aside his opportunity in favour of his nearest rival. The occasion was the 35th anniversary of **Messiah from Scratch**, first performed at the Royal Albert Hall on 4 December 1974 and every year since.

To everyone apart from the **British Heart Foundation**, for whose benefit the auction was conducted, the identity of the top bidder remains a secret, but he announced from his seat in the Hall that he would prefer to watch while the person he outbid, retired computer expert Mike Jackson, took the podium in his stead. Mr Jackson, who has been attending **Messiah from Scratch** for the past 20 years, clearly knew the Hallelujah Chorus well and steered a record-breaking 3,900 singers safely through an extra performance of the piece at the end of the concert interval, to tumultuous applause from singers and audience alike.

Conducting **The Really Big Chorus** in the full performance of Handel's *Messiah* was **Sir David Willcocks**, himself setting something of a record. Approaching his 90th birthday, he coaxed a rhythmical and energetic performance from his massive choral forces accompanied by the English Festival Orchestra. The accomplished quartet of soloists, selected by audition the month before, comprised Claire Watkins (soprano), Helen Sherman (mezzo soprano), James Geer (tenor) and Marcus Farnsworth (baritone).

Racking up the bidding during the 15-minute auction was **Hugh Edmeades**, international auctioneer and Chairman of **Christie's, South Kensington**, who encouraged participants to break previous auction records by pushing the mounting bids to the final five-figure sum.

Handel, a renowned philanthropist in his time, would doubtless have approved.

ENDS

Notes for editors

1. **Messiah from Scratch** (founded in 1974 by engineer Don Monro with three scientist colleagues) is an utterly unique experience. You bring your music, take your seat and sing—that's it! Musically speaking this is definitely 'living dangerously' and the effect is an electrifying and exciting performance which draws people back year after year.
2. The **British Heart Foundation** (registered charity number 225971) has been associated with **Messiah from Scratch** for over 30 years, benefiting at each concert from all programme sales, sponsorship, advertising and collections.
3. **The Really Big Chorus** is a registered charity, number 1061515.

More information from

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