

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A MUSICAL TRADITION:
MEANING, VALUE AND SOCIAL PROCESS IN THE
SOUTH AFRICAN HISTORY OF HANDEL'S *MESSIAH*.

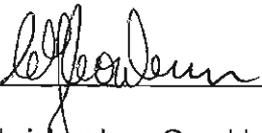
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Durban, South Africa.

CHRISTOPHER COCKBURN

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DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. All citations, references and borrowed ideas have been duly acknowledged. It is being submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Science, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa. None of the present work has been submitted previously for any degree or examination in any other University.



Christopher Cockburn

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ABSTRACT

Handel's *Messiah* occupies a unique position in the musical life of South Africa. No item from the canon of 'classical' European choral music has been performed more often, over a longer period of time, and in a wider range of social contexts. This thesis seeks to answer two broad and interrelated questions: what were the social processes which brought this situation about; and how were perceptions of *Messiah*'s meaning affected by its performance in social contexts markedly different from those of its origins? I concentrate on the two South African choral traditions for which *Messiah* has been central – those of the 'English' and 'African' communities – and on the period from the first documented performance of any item from *Messiah* until the emergence of a pattern of annual performances, which I take as a significant indicator of the historical moment at which the music could be regarded as firmly established in its new context.

The history of *Messiah*'s performance and reception in South Africa is traced using previous research on South African musical history and my own archival research and interviews. Following the broad outline of 'depth hermeneutics' proposed by John Thompson, I regard performances of *Messiah* as symbolic forms in structured contexts, and I interpret them through an analysis of relevant aspects of Jennens's libretto and Handel's music, of the discourse that surrounded the performances (where examples of this have survived), and of the social contexts and processes in which the performances were embedded. In examining the interactions of these different aspects, I draw on a variety of theoretical and methodological strands within musicology, cultural studies, and South African historical research.

The cultural value accorded to *Messiah* emerges as a central theme. As a form of symbolic capital highly valued by dominant groups (the 'establishment') in the relevant South African contexts, it became an indicator of 'legitimate' identity and therefore of status. For both the English settlers and the emerging African elite (the primary agents in the establishment of *Messiah* in South Africa), it could represent the cultures in relation to which they defined themselves, towards which they aspired and within which they sought recognition: respectively, those of the metropole and of 'Western Christian civilization'. In political terms, this had the potential both to reinforce existing patterns of domination and to challenge them. Examples are given of the ways in which, at different moments in its South African history, *Messiah* was mobilized to support or to subvert an established political order, as a result of the specific meanings that it was understood to convey.

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Everyone who has expressed interest in this thesis, discussed aspects of it, and given support, encouragement or practical assistance to me in a multitude of different forms (some not directly related to the thesis) has made an important contribution to it, perhaps more so than some might realize. To acknowledge all of them as they deserve would require another chapter, if not another thesis. Since the basis of their assistance has been that I should finally complete the thesis, I hope they will forgive me for not attempting to name them all individually, but that they will know that their contributions have been greatly valued.

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Colleagues, friends and family have in many and various ways had to accommodate the thesis over a long period of time, and I thank them for their patience and kindness. The impact of the thesis on the lives of those closest to me has of course been greatest. The final word of thanks therefore goes to Karin, who may now be able to enjoy a holiday that is not also an opportunity to track down another piece of data or write about the pieces already gathered.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Origins and scope

My first memory of Handel's *Messiah* is surprisingly clear and specific. Its visual component consists of the stage of the City Hall in Pietermaritzburg, and focuses particularly on the wooden tiers leading up to the towering carved woodwork and golden pipes of the organ, on which are arrayed (in black and white costume) the members of the Pietermaritzburg Philharmonic Society. It is an impressive sight, particularly for a small boy seeing it for the first time, and my sense of the importance of this event is only heightened by the packed hall. It is therefore with a certain sense of pride that I pick out amongst the singers several people that I know, including (in the front row of the altos) my mother. Perhaps that personal connection accounts for the aural component of my memory: not the overture, nor the tenor solo that follows, but the first notes sung by the chorus, which are entrusted to the altos, 'And the glory, the glory of the Lord ...' As the years passed, I became aware that this event happened every year, shortly before Christmas, and at some point I was told that it was a tradition that had been maintained for more than a hundred years. For the English community of Pietermaritzburg, to which I belonged, this annual event was clearly an important part of its heritage, one of the ways through which it established its sense of itself as a local community while at the same time affirming its links to other times and places.

The unique position of *Messiah* in the musical life of English South Africans was thus something I understood through personal experience from an early age. The Philharmonic Society performed much other music, but it was only *Messiah* that had the status of a long-standing annual tradition. My own involvement with *Messiah* continued in other places, as I graduated from audience member to the role of organist and eventually conductor. The origins of the present research project, however, lie in my belated discovery that there was a parallel South African *Messiah* tradition of which I had remained largely unaware.

This was first clearly brought to my attention at a committee meeting of the Eastern Cape branch of the Royal School of Church Music that took place in Grahamstown in the late 1980s. Newly arrived in the area, I had been asked to conduct a choral workshop for the RSCM in King William's Town. The committee at the time was grappling with the question of how to achieve a greater degree of (black) African participation in its events, which had in the past served a primarily white (and English) constituency. Everyone on the committee was aware of the large numbers of African churches that had choirs, but it also appeared that their existing choral practices were substantially different from those of the white churches. Since I had been trained in the English choral tradition, and was only beginning to discover some of the music of the black African church, the music for the workshop would still primarily have to be drawn from the category of 'Western classical'. If we wanted to engage members of African choirs, however, it would certainly be an advantage if their experience of the whole day was not of something completely unfamiliar. What point of connection could I find between these different choral traditions? Was there any music that both black and white participants might find accessible, even

something they already knew, so that at least part of the day could advance beyond the level of mere note learning? As I talked about my concerns, a committee member from King William's Town, Dr Tim Ndaki, smiled and said: 'Well, there's always the "Hallelujah" Chorus.'

Twenty years later, it is hard to believe that this should have been news to me: the fact not only that some African choirs knew 'Hallelujah', but that I could virtually take it for granted that *any* African choir members coming to the workshop *would* know it. Of course, my ignorance on this matter demonstrates the effectiveness with which barriers had been erected and maintained between the white and black communities of apartheid South Africa – or, at least, my own failure to penetrate them. But this prompted a question: if people had so effectively been kept apart, how had they come to share, in this respect at least, what appeared to be a common culture? These personal experiences – which constituted what I might now consider to be my first, informally gathered, pieces of empirical data – called for incorporation into some sort of history that would make sense of them. The question with which this research project began could therefore be formulated in this way: Why (for what reasons) and how (by what processes) did Handel's *Messiah* come to be such a central feature of the musical life of both the English and African communities in South Africa?

I first began to think seriously about this as material for a possible thesis in the mid-1990s, the early years of post-apartheid South Africa. With the official barriers fallen, this was a time when many South Africans were attempting to focus on what they had in common rather than what divided them. It was tempting to approach *Messiah* in these terms: certainly it appeared to be something that was shared by the hitherto divided communities. Several people I spoke to informally during the early stages of this project suggested that the answer to my question was really quite obvious: *Messiah* was simply a great work. There was nothing surprising in the fact that this greatness had been recognized in South Africa as it was in England. Its inherent value gave it a universality which enabled it to transcend differences of historical, geographical and social context. If they were correct in saying this, could *Messiah* perhaps stand as the symbol of a common humanity, something which South Africans had particular reasons to emphasize?

Attractive as this idea seemed, the discourse of commonality and new beginnings had to contend with a competing discourse that emphasized the continuing salience of difference and the past. This leap to an instant commonality was too easy, overlooked too much. Apartheid's imposed divisions, no matter how questionable their basis and no matter how much people now desired to move away from them, had resulted in radically different historical experiences for the different groups defined by them. All people might be equal in an abstract or ideal sense, but not in the concrete reality of their daily lives. From this point of view, it became especially pertinent to consider whether, despite *Messiah*'s status as common cultural property, there might not be important differences in the social processes by which it had become established in each community, the meanings it was understood to convey, the value attributed to it, and the uses to which it was put. In accounting for *Messiah*'s centrality in each musical tradition, it would be necessary to consider all of these interrelated aspects.

Questions of meaning and social context had long been my primary interests in the field of musicology, but appropriate frameworks through which to explore them had

not always been readily available. Here I shall simply mention a couple of landmarks on my personal route to the approach I adopted in dealing with the history of *Messiah* in these two South African communities; in the next section of this Introduction I shall locate the present research more formally in terms of theory and method.

The minor dissertation I completed for my Masters degree in organ performance at the University of Cape Town surveyed the organ music of Olivier Messiaen ‘with particular reference to the relationship between a religious philosophy and musical expression’ (Cockburn, 1981). While this indicates my intention to explore questions of musical meaning by connecting the ‘musical’ to the ‘extramusical’, academic musicology did not then seem to offer a particularly hospitable environment in which to take this further, and my professional musical life became fully occupied by my activities as an organist, choral conductor and lecturer in Music Theory.

From time to time I nevertheless discovered exceptions to musicology’s general lack of what Lawrence Kramer would later specify as ‘human interest’ (1995: 1). The first of these exceptions was closest to home. From the time that he was appointed to a professorship at the (then) University of Natal in Durban, Christopher Ballantine had been concerned to restore what, in the title of his inaugural lecture, he called the ‘forgotten relationship’ between music and society. This lecture was later published in the collection *Music and its Social Meanings* (1984). These essays encouraged me to broaden my thinking about musical meaning to include not only the philosophical and theological dimensions that I had begun to explore (very tentatively and, as I now think, unsatisfactorily) in my work on Messiaen, but also, in a much more direct way, social and political dimensions.

Four years after Ballantine’s book came a collection which made a significant contribution towards making the international musicological climate more favourable for the kind of work I was interested in pursuing: *Music and Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance and Reception* (Leppert & McClary, 1987). It prepared the ground for the present thesis in several ways: by its explicit focus on social and political issues, its inclusion of performance and reception alongside composition as areas for investigation, and perhaps most importantly, its willingness to draw on theoretical approaches from beyond the disciplinary boundaries of musicology, strictly conceived. Indeed, its central concern was to apply to music the kind of socially and politically grounded critical approaches that had, in the recent past, transformed the study of the arts and humanities more generally (ibid: xi). In retrospect it can be seen to have signalled the arrival of what was initially called the ‘new’ musicology, later to become absorbed in the mainstream as ‘critical’ or ‘cultural’ musicology.

Ballantine received an honourable mention as one of a handful of precursors of the kind of work represented in that collection, but his South African location was erased by his assimilation into a group of British scholars (ibid: xii). This is perhaps understandable, since South Africa makes no appearance in *Music and its Social Meanings*. By the time I approached him to discuss possible topics for a doctoral thesis, however, South Africa had become the primary focus of his work, as represented most notably by *Marabi Nights* (1993). Although my interest in his work was its concern with social meaning, my preliminary discussions with him also persuaded me of the wisdom of pursuing this approach in terms of my own local

context and experience, and thus I came to the reflections with which I began this chapter.

My initial intention was to cover the entire history of *Messiah* in South Africa, but as my research proceeded it became clear that *Messiah*'s reach was such that it would be impossible to do justice to all the available material within the scope of a single thesis – if, that is, my aim was to produce something more than an unadorned chronicle of events, simply documenting one aspect of South African musical life, as many previous theses have done (see below: 16). Documentation certainly remained an important element in this thesis, but my concern, broadly conceived, was rather to investigate the relationship between a particular (iconic) musical work and the changing socio-historical contexts in which it was performed. The level of detail and depth of discussion required for this would inevitably entail some reduction in the range of examples that could be included.

If, then, my more specific focus was the process through which *Messiah* attained its central status in contexts far removed (historically, geographically and socially) from those of its origins, this suggested two limitations on the scope of the discussion. Firstly, I have concentrated on *Messiah*'s role in the choral activities only of those communities where it has indeed assumed a unique status. These are what I shall provisionally refer to as the 'English' and 'African' communities, reserving a discussion of the inherent problems of these identity labels for the end of this chapter (see below: 20). My initial research suggested that *Messiah* never took such an obviously commanding position amongst the choirs of the Afrikaans community. It has undoubtedly made important appearances there, but these invite discussion from rather different points of view, some of which I highlighted in a paper presented to the 17th Symposium on Ethnomusicology held in Grahamstown (Cockburn, 2002), and plan to treat more fully at a later stage. The 'Afrikaans *Messiah*' will therefore not specifically be discussed in this thesis, with the single exception of *Messiah*'s very first documented appearance in South Africa, which involved the Dutch-Afrikaner community of Cape Town alongside the English.

Secondly, I have concentrated on the earlier stages of *Messiah*'s South African history, from the time when it made its first appearances till the time when it became firmly established as 'a tradition'. As a rough marker of the latter moment, I have taken the institution of a pattern of annual performances. It is perhaps this feature more than any other that characterizes *Messiah*'s unique position: with no other oratorio (nor, indeed, any other work of Western classical music) has there been a comparable impulse to ensure its regular performance at the same time each year (usually Christmas or Easter). In the case of the English community of South Africa, this development took place in the latter part of the nineteenth century; in the African community, the late 1950s and 1960s. I have therefore ended my account of the 'English *Messiah*' around the turn of the century, and that of the 'African *Messiah*' around 1970. Its subsequent history in each case concerns not so much the establishment of the tradition as its maintenance, renewal or perhaps (most recently) its transformation. Aspects of this later history have been the subject of a conference paper (Cockburn, 1999) and a journal article (Cockburn, 2003), and I hope to take up these and other aspects elsewhere.

The word ‘establishment’ in my title therefore refers, most obviously, to the process through which, from the time of its first performance in South Africa, *Messiah* became an institution. In addition to this ‘ecological’ connotation (as of a species settling into a secure position in a new environment) I intend to invoke two subsidiary meanings. A necessary first step in the research was the attempt to establish what the musical tradition actually was. Before any explanation of social process or interpretation of meaning could be undertaken, I had to determine, as far as it was possible to do so, how much of *Messiah* had been performed where, when, how, by whom, and under what circumstances. While I fully recognize the contested status of ‘facts’ in historical research (see, for example, Munslow, 2000: 97-100), the thesis nevertheless embodies my attempt to establish certain facts about this specific tradition. Finally, the thesis will be concerned with the people who constitute *Messiah*’s own ‘establishment’ – those who are associated most closely with it as performers, promoters, audience, and commentators – and also those who constitute the broader socio-political ‘establishment’ at a given moment. In particular, it will consider the extent to which the prominent position gained by *Messiah* enabled different groups to use it to support or subvert an established socio-political order.

Theoretical and methodological locations

The juxtaposition of ‘*Messiah*’ and ‘South Africa’ required a perspective that would do justice to the specific features of the ‘cultural’ on the one hand and the ‘social-historical’ on the other. I have drawn on a wide range of work dealing with both aspects, much of which will be noted at those places in the thesis where it is most relevant. In this Introduction, however, I shall discuss two more general theoretical and methodological frameworks which meet the criterion just stated, and on which I have drawn extensively: the broad field of cultural studies, and the work of the British sociologist John B. Thompson. Since the diversity of cultural studies makes it more difficult to summarize than Thompson’s systematic presentation, I shall first outline Thompson’s approach in some detail, and then mention more briefly those elements from cultural studies that have proved particularly helpful in supporting or amplifying it for the purposes of this thesis. I shall end with a brief discussion of the contributions made by some writers who have been specifically concerned with music.

In his book *Ideology and Modern Culture* (1990), Thompson offers both a comprehensive theory of culture and a general methodology for interpreting it, while cautioning against any attempt to make a strong separation between theory and method (ibid: 272). Thompson sees his ‘structural’ conception of culture as a modification of the ‘symbolic’ conception established in the field of anthropology primarily by Clifford Geertz, especially in his book *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973). Thompson agrees with Geertz that ‘the concept of culture can appropriately be used to refer ... to the patterns of meaning embodied in the symbolic forms exchanged in social interaction’ (J. B. Thompson, 1990: 12). For Geertz, to analyze culture is to unravel layers of meaning (ibid: 131), which is to say it is an interpretive activity, akin to reading a literary text (ibid: 134).

Thompson argues, however, that an awareness of the symbolic or meaningful character of cultural phenomena must be combined with a recognition that such phenomena are always ‘embedded in structured social contexts involving relations of

power, forms of conflict, inequalities in terms of the distribution of resources' (ibid: 12), an aspect to which he feels Geertz's work gives insufficient attention. Following Thompson, then, I regard my 'object' of analysis as a symbolic form (*Messiah*, or more specifically, a *performance of Messiah*) in a structured context (a particular time and place in South Africa). Accordingly, the process of analysis examines both the meaningful constitution and the social contextualization of symbolic forms (ibid: 136).

In order to grasp the way symbolic forms are constituted as meaningful phenomena, it is necessary to attend to what Thompson describes as their 'intentional, conventional, structural, and referential aspects' (ibid: 162), the relative importance of which may vary according to circumstance (ibid: 139). Symbolic forms are 'intentional' to the extent that they are understood as being produced or employed by people in pursuit of certain aims or purposes (ibid: 138). This is not to assume that meaning is identical with the producer's intention, as Thompson is careful to note, but simply to recognize that the constitution of a symbolic form as meaningful presupposes that it is the expression of a subject for a subject or subjects (this is what distinguishes it from a natural pattern such as clouds in the sky). It is this understanding of 'intention' that I am assuming when, in the course of this thesis, I ask what people 'meant' by performing *Messiah*, or at least what their purposes were understood to be by those who listened to the performance or even became aware of it in a less direct way (such as having it reported to them).

Symbolic forms are 'conventional' to the extent that their production and reception involves the application of rules, codes and conventions of various kinds (ibid: 139-40). Thompson points out that people who apply such rules may not be explicitly aware of them nor be able to formulate them clearly: they frequently exist in tacit form as a kind of practical knowledge of how things are done and how they should be understood. They are nevertheless always social, in the sense of being shared by more than one individual, and may therefore be open to correction or sanction by others. There is also the possibility that a symbolic form encoded according to one set of conventions may be decoded according to another. This element of Thompson's scheme has wide application in the thesis. I suggest understandings of musical materials that depend on convention (for example, the principles of tonality). I consider conventions for the performance of *Messiah* (for example, the desirable size of the choir) that were quite explicitly formulated by both performers and critics, and clearly used by the latter to judge the former. Ideas held by such participants about *Messiah's* meaning and its appropriateness in certain contexts also embodied a variety of understandings that had become conventions, explicit or tacit (for example, the idea that *Messiah* is peculiarly British, or the use of the 'Hallelujah' Chorus as a grand finale).

Thompson describes symbolic forms as 'structural' because they 'typically consist of elements which stand in determinate relations with one another' (ibid: 141). Like 'convention', this is a very broad concept that finds application on several levels in the thesis. *Messiah*, viewed as a composition, has a structure within which the relationships of different elements can be specified. Indeed, this structure itself comprises several levels. Individual notes combine to form structures of melody, harmony, and rhythm; musical structures are combined with a verbal text that has its own structure; the combination of words and music in a series of items gives the work

as a whole a particular formal structure. *Messiah* viewed as a performance event also has a structural aspect, created by the relationships of performers (conductor, soloists, members of the chorus and orchestra), organizers and promoters, audience, and commentators. Attention to different elements of these structures, as they become more or less salient in different contexts, can elucidate the meaning conveyed by particular performances of *Messiah*.

The fourth characteristic of symbolic forms in Thompson's conception is the 'referential' aspect. By this Thompson seeks to include not only the direct sense in which a word, for example, may refer to a particular object, but also a more general sense in which a symbolic form (or certain of its elements) may, in a given context, stand for or represent some object or state of affairs. Symbolic forms typically 'say something about something' (ibid: 143). The primary interpretive task of this thesis is to suggest what was being 'said' by particular performances of *Messiah*. Attention to the referential aspect of symbolic forms makes it possible to suggest, for example, that what *Messiah* may be representing in a given context is 'Christianity' (because of its title and the content of its libretto). Given that understanding, its performance by a particular group of people may then be taken to represent their identification with Christianity, and one of the things the performance then 'says' is: 'These people are Christians.'

The social contextualization of symbolic forms is also constitutive of their meaning, and to this extent a fifth or 'contextual' aspect can be set alongside the four just mentioned, highlighting the fact that 'symbolic forms are always embedded in specific social-historical contexts and processes within which, and by means of which, they are produced, transmitted and received' (ibid: 145). However, Thompson gives this aspect separate consideration, because of the extent to which it involves moving beyond the boundaries of the symbolic form itself, in ways that he feels have frequently been neglected in discussions of meaning and interpretation (ibid: 137).

Thompson distinguishes four aspects of social contexts: spatial and temporal settings, fields of interaction, institutions and an overall social structure (ibid: 151). I give attention to all of these within the thesis, to varying degrees as may be appropriate in a particular case. The general spatial setting (South Africa) and the temporal frame for this research have been mentioned above. Within these, each performance is more specifically situated in terms of space (locality and performance venue) and time (mainly by year, but where relevant by season, day, time, or some form of historical periodization).

Thompson borrows the idea of a 'field of interaction' from the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. For the purposes of this thesis, the primary field is that of choral music, but others are relevant in connection with particular historical developments (for example, the field of mission education). Within a field, individuals occupy specific positions at any given time and also follow certain trajectories through time. Their activities within the field involve the application of conventions (understood in the sense defined above), and depend on the possession of various resources or types of 'capital': economic (money or property in various forms), cultural (skills, knowledge and education), and symbolic (reputation and status) (ibid: 148). The thesis is concerned with a wide variety of actors, but most frequent attention is given to performers (as the 'producers' of *Messiah* on a given occasion) and reviewers,

mostly anonymous (who are often the only ‘receivers’ of a performance whose attitudes and responses have been recorded).

Institutions may be thought of as relatively stable formations of resources, conventions and social relations (ibid: 149). They are situated within fields of interaction, but at the same time they can also create fields of interaction by establishing new positions and trajectories (ibid: 282). Analysis may focus both on specific institutional forms (such as ‘the Pietermaritzburg Philharmonic Society’) or generic forms (such as ‘choral societies’). Finally, there is the broader social structure, which Thompson sees as characterized by ‘relatively stable asymmetries and differentials in terms of the distribution of, and access to, resources of various kinds, power, opportunities and life chances’ (ibid: 150). For the purposes of this thesis, the effects of social structure at this broadest level are examined in relation to British colonialism, British imperialism, the emergence of an African middle class, and apartheid (these correspond, approximately, with the four main divisions of the thesis). All of these, in a variety of ways, imply power relations that are, in Thompson’s words, ‘systematically asymmetrical’ (ibid: 151). This means that one part of the social structure is endowed with power that to a significant degree remains inaccessible to another part, and an important theme in this thesis will be *Messiah*’s role in sustaining or challenging various forms of domination and subordination.

‘Context’ in the sense discussed above is not merely the backdrop for the activity in question: it is constitutive of action and interaction (ibid: 150) and also of the production and reception of symbolic forms. Production (which for the purposes of this thesis I take to be equivalent to performance) and reception involve the use of available resources and the application of particular conventions by individuals situated in determinate ways within fields, institutions and the broader social structure (ibid: 152). The anticipated reception of a symbolic form may influence its production in significant ways. Thompson emphasizes that reception is not a passive process but one in which the meaning of the symbolic form is actively constituted (ibid: 153). Audience members at a performance of *Messiah*, that is to say, can be expected actively to make sense of what they are hearing. The ways in which they do so may differ, depending on their position within the relevant social contexts.

One consequence of the contextualization of symbolic forms to which Thompson gives particular attention is that they are frequently subjected to complex processes of valuation and evaluation (ibid: 154). We may assume that *Messiah* would not have ascended to its dominant position if it had not been highly valued by individuals and groups with the resources to produce it. Thompson distinguishes two principal types of valorization, ‘economic’ and ‘symbolic’. Although it is never possible to separate the two completely, this thesis will primarily be concerned with symbolic value. This is the value that objects have ‘by virtue of the ways in which, and the extent to which, they are *esteemed* by the individuals who produce and receive them’ (ibid: italics in original). In the following passage, Thompson describes a process that is of crucial importance in understanding *Messiah*’s South African history:

In acquiring symbolic value, a work may acquire a degree of legitimacy – that is, it may be recognized as legitimate not only by those who are well positioned to ascribe symbolic value, but also by those who recognize and respect the position of those who ascribe it. To the extent that a work is

recognized as legitimate, the producer of the work is endowed with honour, prestige or respect.

(ibid: 155)

The ‘producer’ in the case of a *Messiah* performance is most obviously the performers themselves, but as we shall see they are frequently taken to represent the achievements of some collective entity to which they belong. This is particularly true of the choir, which (for the performances considered here) typically consisted of amateurs who were simply fellow members of the community and therefore easily understood as representing that community’s collective accomplishment.

Thompson’s theory of culture has clear implications for methodology. His discussion of this begins with the fact that symbolic forms are meaningful constructs which call for interpretation (ibid: 272). In asking what meanings South Africans have constructed for and through *Messiah*, my task becomes the interpretation of their interpretations of *Messiah*. It is for this reason that Thompson’s strong link to the tradition of hermeneutics is important. In developing his methodological framework, Thompson draws on the idea of ‘depth hermeneutics’ found in the work of Paul Ricoeur and others, in which the process of interpretation is ‘mediated by a range of explanatory or “objectifying” methods’ (ibid: 278).

For Thompson, the starting point for an interpretation is ‘an elucidation of the ways in which symbolic forms are interpreted and understood by the individuals who produce and receive them in the course of their everyday lives’ (ibid: 279). This could be described as the ‘ethnographic’ moment of the process. However, the historical focus of my topic means that it has not been possible to make direct observations or to interview participants at the time of their involvement in performances. I have in a few cases been able to interview people who were present at events that took place thirty to sixty years previously, but for the most part I have drawn on whatever written records may have survived (which I recognize as themselves already being interpretations). The most important records have been the reviews of concerts published in newspapers, and (to a lesser extent) statements in concert programmes. Thompson calls this reconstruction of everyday understanding the ‘interpretation of doxa’ (ibid).

However, he argues that an exclusive preoccupation with this level of analysis is as misleading as the failure to take it into account (ibid: 280). It is when analysis moves beyond the interpretation of doxa that we can properly speak of ‘depth hermeneutics’. Thompson’s version has three principal phases or procedures, which he calls ‘social-historical analysis, formal or discursive analysis, and interpretation/re-interpretation’ (ibid: 281).

Social-historical analysis deals with the four aspects of social context discussed above (spatio-temporal settings, fields of interaction, institutions, and structure). Its task is to reconstruct the conditions in which the production, circulation and reception of symbolic forms occurs. Some elements of context were relatively easy to reconstruct on the basis of archival material (programmes, newspaper reports) directly concerned with specific performances, but for others I have relied on a wide range of research in the fields of South African history, sociology and politics. These will be introduced in the sections of the thesis where they are relevant, but among the most important examples, I could mention here the social history of Cape Town in the early

nineteenth century by Nigel Worden, Elizabeth van Heyningen and Vivan Bickford-Smith (1998); Alan Lester's research on the identities constructed by the British settlers of the Eastern Cape in the mid-nineteenth century (2001); Leon de Kock's scrutiny of African responses to missionary education (1996); and Alan Cobley's examination of South Africa's mission-educated African elite in terms of their class consciousness as a 'mature petty bourgeoisie' (1990).

Formal or discursive analysis, the second phase of Thompson's methodological framework, is concerned primarily with the internal organization of symbolic forms (J. B. Thompson, 1990: 284). It deals with the 'structural' and 'conventional' aspects of symbolic forms. This is, broadly, the domain of semiotics. I have made use of this type of analysis in examining the music and libretto of *Messiah* itself, the performance setting, and the written reviews produced after the event. It involves identifying the various elements which are present, examining the ways in which they are interrelated, and connecting them to the systems and codes of which they are part (ibid: 285). Thus, for example, I identify the presence of certain elements in the music of the 'Hallelujah' Chorus and relate them to similarly identified elements of the verbal text as well as to the conventional codes established in Baroque music; or I identify certain ideas introduced in the review of a South African *Messiah* performance and relate them to elements of the conventional discourse for writing about music which had been established in nineteenth-century England.

The third phase ('interpretation/re-interpretation') depends on the other two as well as informing the way they are carried out, but it is nevertheless distinct from them. It involves 'the creative construction of possible meaning' (ibid: 289), and aims specifically to grasp the 'referential' aspect of symbolic forms. By specifying 're-interpretation' alongside 'interpretation', Thompson is drawing attention to the fact that the objects of interpretation are already interpreted by the subjects who make up the historical-social world (ibid: 290). My interpretation, mediated via the elements of the depth-hermeneutical approach, may ultimately diverge from theirs. Thompson emphasizes that the possibility of divergent or even conflicting interpretations is intrinsic to the process of interpretation itself. To interpret is always to project a *possible* meaning, since the meaning of symbolic forms is not fixed and given (ibid: 294). Nevertheless, the 'objectifying' methods introduced in the other two phases can assist in making the interpretation a plausible or justifiable one, although the criteria of plausibility, and the kinds of evidence and argument that can be adduced in support of an interpretation, vary according to the context of inquiry (ibid: 321).

Thompson recognizes that the ways in which the three phases are followed through 'in practice will depend on the specific objects of analysis and the kinds of information available to the researcher' (ibid: 281). I have therefore not attempted to carry out an exhaustive application of all aspects of the depth-hermeneutical approach at every point in the thesis. For example, in some cases I have focused particularly on the interpretation of doxa, because detailed contemporary commentary is available for a particular performance. In other cases, the existence of a substantial body of socio-historical research relevant to a certain context gives social-historical analysis the most important interpretive role, which may indeed compensate for the relative scarcity of explicit commentary. In some cases, analysis of the musical materials may offer the most important clue to *Messiah's* significance in a given context; in others, it is the verbal text that yields the richest insights. Thompson also views the depth-

hermeneutic approach, in its totality, not as an alternative to existing methods of analysis but rather as a general framework within which they can be situated and related to each other (ibid: 273), showing their strengths and limitations for particular purposes, and recognizing that some may be more appropriate than others in specific cases (ibid: 281).

As noted at the beginning of my discussion of Thompson, the symbolic conception of culture which he takes from Geertz suggests that interpreting culture is like reading a text. In order to interpret *Messiah* in South Africa, I have adopted the expanded notion of 'text' as used in the field of cultural studies: 'a text is anything that generates meaning through signifying practices' (Barker, 2004: 199). This allows me to 'read' *Messiah* (a musical composition) as a text, and also to 'read' a particular performance of it as a text, since 'images, sounds, objects and practices are sign systems which signify with the same fundamental mechanism as a language' (ibid). At the same time, it provides a way of understanding how meaning is created by 'readers'. Semiotics has been an influential stream within cultural studies, and the crucial element which it contributes to the present discussion is the understanding that a sign takes on meaning from outside itself (Thwaites, Davis, & Mules, 2002: 36): it depends for its meaning on what surrounds it. The implication of this is that any sign can have a number of different meanings, each one resulting from the specific context in which it occurs. While the original form of semiotics (derived from Saussure) focuses on the meaning that a sign gets from other signs within a linguistic system, the basic idea was later extended to other aspects of culture. This broader notion of context highlights, amongst other things, the role of 'readers'.

If a text can be interpreted in a number of different ways, the generation of a particular meaning will require the active involvement of readers (Barker, 2003 [2000]: 94). For present purposes I include under the term 'readers' all those who participate in a given performance of *Messiah* – organizers, musicians, listeners, reviewers. While at times it will be necessary to attend to the differences between these positions (the first two being conceived as 'producers' and the second two as 'receivers' of the performance), when it comes to the production of meaning all four are similarly active and can therefore be conceived together as 'readers'. I have not made a strong distinction between the meanings which readers create for texts and the uses which they make of them, since 'interpretation directs the ways of use and vice versa' (Lehtonen, 2000: 130). Since 'meanings are constituted in and through use' (DeNora, 2000: 44) particular ways of understanding *Messiah* will affect people's sense of its appropriateness for certain uses, and the particular ways in which it is used will have an effect on their sense of its meaning. The essential point to make here is that readers produce meaning not in an arbitrary fashion, but in terms of their own socio-cultural history (Lehtonen, 2000: 125). Their knowledge of specific social and cultural codes will be an important aspect of this (Barker, 2003 [2000]: 94), but so will their social position and identity.

While I accept, with David Morley, the fact that there will always be individual private readings, I am primarily concerned in this thesis with readings 'framed by shared cultural formations and practices pre-existent to the individual' (quoted in Staiger, 1992: 72). The work of Vladimir Voloshinov, frequently referenced in cultural studies, is especially useful in suggesting the connection between readers' active creation of meaning and the broader social structure. He refers to signs as 'multi-

accentual', capable of being accented or inflected in a variety of ways 'that express the experiences of different social groups' (McNally, 1997: 31):

Different groups attempt to *accent* words [and other signs] in ways that express their experience of social interaction and their social aspirations. This applies especially, but by no means exclusively, to people in distinct class relationships. As a result, "sign becomes an arena of the class struggle".

(ibid: 29)

As this discussion suggests, cultural studies has incorporated an important Marxist strain through its use of theorists such as Voloshinov. He argues that ruling classes will attempt to 'regulate and "fix" the otherwise shifting meanings of signs' (Barker, 2003 [2000]: 94), but that this will not work because 'official discourses do not capture the whole of the life experiences of the oppressed. The latter have a range of social interactions wholly or partly free from the direct interference of their rulers' (McNally, 1997: 31).

The attempt to fix meaning for specific social purposes is one way of understanding the concept of 'ideology' (Barker, 2004: 98). Ideologies are discourses that produce shared meanings and views of the world, for the purposes of binding people together as a group and justifying their actions. Chris Barker, from the perspective of cultural studies, points out that early Marxist and sociological versions of the concept of ideology restricted its usage to the ideas of the dominant class, and later to those of any group in a position of power, whether this power was based on class or some other differential such as gender or race. Thompson argues strongly for maintaining this asymmetrical concept of ideology, viewing symbolic forms as ideological 'only in so far as they serve to establish and sustain systematically asymmetrical relations of power' (1990: 68), in other words, relations of domination. Barker, however, maintains that at its best in contemporary usage, the notion of ideology implies the 'binding and justifying ideas' of any social group (2004: 98).

In this thesis I attempt to preserve elements of both conceptions. From Thompson I have retained the specific focussing of the concept on relations of power, which enables an examination of the ways in which symbolic forms interact with social situations characterized by inequality. I need hardly point out the relevance of this to the understanding of South African social history – it has been dealt with at book length by Sampie Terreblanche in *A history of inequality in South Africa* (2002). I therefore seek to avoid the neutralization of the concept of ideology which seems to me to be Thompson's main concern (1990: 55). Indeed, if ideology is simply taken to be equivalent to a world view, or a system of belief or symbolic practice, it loses its critical edge. I therefore continue to use it to analyze the ways in which meanings are mobilized in situations of domination, but I apply it both to those meanings which serve to establish and sustain relations of domination, and also to those which challenge, contest or disrupt them. As an initial suggestion of the application of the concept to the material of this thesis, I shall return to an example used earlier. If *Messiah* 'says' 'These people are Christian' in a context where Christianity confers a significant degree of social power (or non-Christianity entails exclusion from power), then it can be viewed as functioning ideologically.

For Thompson, ideology is, by its very nature, hegemonic (1990: 68). Since I have adopted the broader concept of ideology, my use of the concept of hegemony, as it has become established in cultural studies, is intended to preserve this emphasis in

Thompson's conception of ideology. It assumes that 'there is a strand of meanings within any given culture that can be called governing or ascendant' (Barker, 2004: 84); hegemony is then the process of creating and maintaining these meanings. As in the case of 'ideology', the precise understanding and application of the concept have been subject to extensive debate, but the most important common element is the idea that the powerful groups exercise authority and leadership over the subordinate groups not only by force but through the winning of consent. The concept of hegemony was developed by the Italian theorist Antonio Gramsci in attempting to understand the failure of socialist revolution in Western Europe (Kaye, 1992: 12). He argued that it had been contained by ruling-class domination not just of the state but also of civil society, which includes the sphere of cultural activity. In discussing Gramsci's theory, the Marxist social historian Harvey Kaye points to an element which is of particular relevance to *Messiah's* South African history. The subordinate class gives consent to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant group because of the prestige and therefore the trust accruing to the dominant group because of its position and function in the world of production (ibid: 13). It will be an important part of this thesis to examine the connections between the prestige attaching to *Messiah* and that attaching to dominant groups.

This is not to suggest that *Messiah* (or even a certain construction of its meaning) is necessarily or inevitably attached to a particular class or group. As Vološinov put it, 'Class does not coincide with the sign community' (quoted in Middleton, 1990: 8). To understand the relationship between cultural forms (such as *Messiah*) and practices (such as performances of it) on the one hand, and social structure with its competing interests on the other, writers influenced by Gramsci have developed the concept of articulation. This is a specific form of connection, which implies not only the joining together of separate elements to form a unity but also a recognition that the unity is temporary and contingent as well as socially regulated (Barker, 2004: 8). Its main use in cultural studies seems to be to emphasize the idea that, since the elements do not have to go together, there is always the possibility that they can be re-articulated in different ways. The term has been applied not only to the connection between symbolic form and social group, but also to that between text and meaning, as well as to that between different elements contributing to whatever meaning is attached to a symbolic form. My concern in the thesis is to examine how, in different social contexts, particular elements present in the social formation and its ideologies came to be articulated with particular elements of *Messiah*, and with each other, in constructions of its meaning.

I understand the concept of articulation to be claiming a middle ground between asserting that the relationships between social groups and symbolic forms, or between texts and meanings, are fixed, determined or necessary, and asserting that such relationships are open, free or arbitrary. Paul Willis claims a similar median position (although his work makes use of the concept of structural homology rather than articulation). His statement of this position adds an element which I have found methodologically useful in dealing with *Messiah* in relation to the social realities of South Africa. He argues that 'the importance, value, and meaning of a cultural item is given socially, but within objective limitations imposed by its own internal structure: by its "objective possibilities"' (1978: 200). To the extent that these are 'objective', they place limits on the infinite scope for interpretation, but to the extent that they are 'possibilities' they can enable particular social groups to

find their distinctive form of relation to previously unseen aspects of traditional items. In fact, this is one of the classic constituting mechanisms of minority and dominated cultures. Since the obvious potential for a meaningful relation with important cultural items will already have been exploited by the dominant culture, subordinate cultures have to explore the neglected or unseen possibilities to generate their own meanings.

(ibid: 201)

This notion of ‘objective possibilities’ functions in a similar way to that of ‘affordances’, which occupies a key position in Tia DeNora’s account of the way people create musical meaning in the course of their everyday lives. DeNora, too, wishes to avoid suggesting either that the properties of the symbolic form determine its meaning and use, or that they contribute nothing (2000: 35-36). Rather, symbolic forms ‘afford’ people certain things, which can be put to certain uses more easily than others (ibid: 39). De Nora suggests that music is active within social life because it offers ‘specific materials to which actors may turn when they engage in the work of organizing social life’ (ibid: 44). I therefore ask what *Messiah* affords the groups who have promoted it to its central place in their choral traditions.

De Nora points to the importance of locating the affordances in the space between the symbolic object and its user, rather than ‘in’ one or the other. The meaning of the music on a given occasion derives from the ways in which the listeners interact with it. It is listeners who bring together (articulate) music with a variety of other things in order to create meaning ‘by a describable addition, whose sum is greater than its parts’ (ibid: 43). This is a two-way or ‘co-productive’ process, in that ‘music is used to clarify the very things that are used to clarify it’ (ibid: 45). This process is also suggested by Mikko Lehtonen’s contention that the meeting of text, context and reader produces not only meanings but also a new identity for each of the three (2000: 130). In other words, they do not interact as fully-formed totalities, but through their interaction each reconfigures the others.

The same reciprocal process is implied by Thompson’s discussion of valorization (see above: 8): ‘readers’ ascribe value to ‘texts’, and texts confer value on readers. The literary theorist Barbara Herrnstein Smith has argued that in relation to texts, the term ‘value’ cannot be reduced to ‘a single, simple property or possession’ (1990: 180). I adopt her understanding of value as ‘a general name given to a variety of positive effects’. The value of *Messiah* in a given context can then be thought of as the particular kind of positivity that emerges from the engagement of ‘readers’ with it. This conception of value is thus closely related to the notion of affordances. An alternative way of asking what *Messiah* affords to specific readers is to ask what ‘positive effects’ it has for them, and what features they believe produce those effects (ibid: 184). Smith’s conception is especially useful in the present context for its reminder that the valorization of a text is produced not only through explicit verbal statements, but also through acts of implicit evaluation (ibid: 181). For this thesis, the most important such evaluation is implicit simply in the decision to perform *Messiah*, but particularly to perform it regularly (perhaps more often than any other work) or to perform it on especially important occasions.

In presenting his theorization of musical meaning, Nicholas Cook borrows from Daniel Miller an idea similar to those of ‘objective possibilities’ and ‘affordances’,

namely the 'attribute'. A symbolic form has an indefinite though not infinite number of attributes, and different selections from (and interpretations of) these attributes will be made by different groups or on different occasions (2001: 178-179). The way Cook deploys this concept within his 'metaphoric' model for the creation of meaning suggested how I could adapt it for the analysis of *Messiah* in various South African contexts. His argument is that music is always experienced in a context, and so it can be compared to the experience of multimedia. The different components in multimedia interact in the 'co-productive' manner mentioned above: referring to a television commercial, Cook maintains that 'if the music gives meaning to the images, then equally the images give meaning to the music' (1998: 8). A composite meaning therefore emerges, present in neither the image nor the music (2001: 180).

Cook explains the process further with reference to the workings of metaphor, as described by Mark Turner and Gilles Fauconnier (ibid: 181). There are two basic elements. First, there is the 'enabling similarity': the two media (music and image in Cook's example) must present common attributes, without which there would be no perceptual interaction between them. Second, there is the 'blended space' in which 'the attributes unique to each medium are combined, resulting in the emergence of new meaning'. I wish to propose that a given performance context can work in a similar way. It brings together a variety of elements, each with its own set of attributes. In principle, any enabling similarity between these attributes can be taken up by 'readers' in that context so that the meanings of the one become attached to the other. Which of these will in practice become active in a given context cannot be specified apart from the process of interpretation. As Lehtonen says, 'a great number of factors participate in and contribute to the formation of meanings, the role and effects of which cannot be known in advance' (2000: 155).

This conception is close to that which Janet Staiger develops from the work of Richard Dyer, in her study of the historical reception of film. For her, too, the key process is a 'recognition of sufficient similarity' (1992: 159-160). Staiger's conception emphasizes that it is not necessary for the similarity to exist 'in reality' for it to be active: all that is necessary is that it be discovered between social constructions available in a particular context. Her example is the structural similarity between socially-constructed images of gay people and socially-constructed images of Judy Garland. The association created between these does not depend on whether gay people or Judy Garland actually conform to these images. In some of my interpretations, I therefore suggest associations created by similarities between the socially-constructed identities of particular groups of people in South Africa at particular times, and the socially-constructed images of *Messiah* that were available to them.

The work of Roland Barthes has contributed to cultural studies the important idea that the associations created in these ways can work incrementally (Turner, 1990: 18-19). In the same way that, according to him, connotations can gather round a word in such a way that its literal meaning is extended and amplified, so cultural associations and social knowledge can attach themselves to signs in such a way that its meaning becomes increasingly complex. An association accrued in one context can be carried over into a new context as part of the sign's meaning, and thereby enable the gathering of a new set of associations – or, as Paul Willis suggests, constrain the gathering of others: 'what has been made of these [objective] possibilities historically

is a powerful and limiting influence on what is taken from them currently' (1978: 201). Following a lead offered by Richard Middleton, DeNora points out that certain musical works may accumulate long-standing, widely accepted connotations that can be hard to shift. She nevertheless poses the question of what circumstance might result in such a shift and empower alternative, even rival, appropriations (2000: 32-33). In my discussion of the early South African performances I therefore pay attention to those associations established for *Messiah* in England that were reactivated in the new context, and throughout the thesis I consider how previously-established associations were maintained or modified as contexts changed.

Process and form

In this section I provide a brief discussion of the process by which I produced the thesis in its final form. Although I always remained aware of the theoretical and methodological frameworks discussed above, I shall not pretend to have followed a step-by-step 'method' which can now be neatly laid out. This apparent lack of system periodically provoked a degree of anxiety about the validity of my procedures (and the epistemological status of anything that might emerge from them). I therefore took heart when I discovered Gary Tomlinson using such words as 'disordered' and 'haphazard' in describing a contextual approach to cultural analysis in his article 'The Web of Culture: A Context for Musicology' (1984: 357). I did not, of course, take this as a licence to proceed in a manner that had no logic to it at all: rather, it suggested that there could not be a predictable and therefore fixed order in which to proceed in each instance. This agrees with statements about interpretation by Thompson and Lehtonen already quoted (see above: 10; 15), but I found Tomlinson's detailed description of the process particularly helpful, and I shall return to it below.

I began by attempting to reconstruct in broad outline the shape of *Messiah*'s South African history, establishing how much of *Messiah* was performed where, when, how, by whom, and under what circumstances. There was a fair amount of existing archival research on which to draw, mostly in the form of unpublished dissertations documenting musical events that had taken place in the major urban centres of South Africa, within a particular period of time. A typical title was *The Musical Life of Port Elizabeth (1875-1900)* (Troskie, 1969). A smaller number of dissertations focused on individual musicians or performing groups, including some that were involved in *Messiah* performances. There was a handful of published sources, such as Jan Bouws's research on the musical life of early Cape Town (1966) and the four volumes of the *South African Music Encyclopedia* (Malan, 1979, 1982b, 1984, 1986d). Many entries in the latter were summaries of material in the dissertations, either by the authors themselves or by the editor of the *Encyclopedia*, sometimes with additional information that was rather fragmentary and not always accurate.

The patient examination of thousands of issues of newspapers undertaken in these studies would have been impossible for one researcher, and they have thus provided an indispensable foundation for my present research. There were nevertheless significant limitations to the existing work. With rare exceptions, the dissertations were essentially chronicles of events. Such contextual information as appeared was treated as 'background', and there was little or no attempt to consider the questions of social meaning that were central to the work of Ballantine and a few others concerned

with different areas of the musical field. In most cases it was simply taken for granted that the 'musical life' which was the object of research was that of the white community, and that Western classical music should be the main focus of attention. Such studies did, therefore, prove very useful in locating performances presented by and for the English community, but there were still gaps. The one which I felt was potentially the most significant for my own research was the early years of Port Elizabeth, and I therefore undertook my own scan of the local newspaper, the *Eastern Province Herald*, for the years 1857 – 1863.

A presentation of *Messiah* was always seen as a significant event in the musical life of a given community, likely to be reported in the newspapers and therefore mentioned in the record made by the authors of the dissertations. Having extracted references to *Messiah* from these sources, it was then possible to go directly to the issues of the newspapers concerned and examine more fully what was said in the advertisements, reports and/or reviews that accompanied the performances. This was time-consuming, requiring visits to libraries which held hard or microfilm copies of the newspapers, but nevertheless essential, since details omitted in the dissertations often provided valuable clues suggesting the direction which interpretation might take. I have not taken the views expressed by reviewers as providing the final word about a given performance, nor have I taken it for granted that their specific judgements are representative. At the same time, there is equally no reason to assume that their opinions are necessarily idiosyncratic and not shared by other members of the community. What they say can provide useful evidence that certain ideas were active in the context of the performance; indeed, their words may have contributed to making them active. Apart from newspapers, other forms of archival material were available for some performances. The most important of these were concert programmes, which could sometimes provide evidence of the meanings that the organizers and/or performers offered to listeners at a particular performance.

Although there were many studies dealing with traditional and popular forms of African musicking, there was very little in the dissertations about African involvement with Western classical music. During the time my own research was being undertaken, two important doctoral theses appeared, both on choral music, by Markus Detterbeck (2002) and Grant Olwage (2003). Nevertheless, there was nothing which enabled me to track *Messiah*'s performance history in the African community in the way that I was able to do in the English community. I therefore spent several weeks trawling through the copies of the *Bantu World* (the most important newspaper aimed at an African readership, particularly in the townships of Johannesburg), from its inception in 1932 through to 1959. Even this was only possible because it appeared weekly rather than daily. It provided valuable evidence about performances of *Messiah* as well as aspects of context. Supplementary information about events within living memory could be obtained from interviews, but for *Messiah*'s earlier appearances in the African community (dating back to the nineteenth century) I had to draw together fragments of evidence from a wide range of sources, most of them not specifically concerned with music. These are discussed in the relevant sections of the thesis.

It was only after a fair amount of material had been gathered in this way that a picture began to emerge of the shape and scope of *Messiah*'s presence in South Africa, leading to the abovementioned decision not to attempt to cover all of it within the

thesis itself. To begin the process of interpretation, I gathered whatever contextual material seemed to offer the richest possibilities. There was no formula for this, to be applied mechanically in each instance, nor could the 'gathering' be separated from the ongoing process of interpretation itself. There was nevertheless a certain logic to the process, and it is here that I return to Tomlinson's account. Beginning with 'the particular nexus in the cultural web that we chose as the object of our study' – a madrigal is his example, mine would be a performance of *Messiah* – the process would then 'work out from this nexus along strands leading to nearby entanglements with other strands', directed to these by our assumptions as to what would illuminate the object most brightly. As the immediate context grew more familiar, the object would take on increased significance, new and to some degree unexpected meanings, which in turn would force us to shift ... the assumptions governing our exploration of the context And this would lead us along new strands of the web to new connections, all of them likewise altering our assumptions. (1984: 356)

This process should result in what Geertz calls a 'thick description', one which locates the symbolic form in its 'web of culture' (Tomlinson, 1984: 351). Tomlinson's essay was, to my knowledge, the first proposal from within the field of musicology that the ideas of Geertz should be seriously engaged as a basis for future work. Tomlinson argues that historical musicologists, in particular, could draw on the awareness of the affinities that anthropologists and historians have found between their disciplines (ibid: 353), as they deal with the activities of people distant in time, on the one hand, and space, on the other (ibid: 351), a theme to which he has returned in a more recent essay entitled 'Music, Anthropology, History' (2003). This encouraged me to apply this approach in the context of historical research, but my application of it does not depend on any opposition between 'close' and 'distant' cultures. Indeed, my material highlights the impossibility of drawing clear boundaries between what constitutes 'my' culture and that of 'others'. According to Michel de Certeau, the assumed existence of such boundaries constituted one of the supports for the disciplinary separation between ethnographic and historical work, a separation that Tomlinson rejects. De Certeau argues that ethnography starts from a gesture of alterity, historiography from an assumption of identity (ibid: 31).

I recognize that my own cultural location entailed beginning with certain assumptions about every performance which I considered, but I took these simply as starting points from which to find a path along the strands of the web to other points that would confirm, modify or change those assumptions. What I did not begin from was the assumption that I could approach any performance either as an 'insider' or an 'outsider' – or if I did start out with this commonsense assumption, it was one of the first to be challenged. Did it make sense to say that the performance of *Messiah* in Pietermaritzburg in 1864 belonged to 'my' culture, simply because I was born there and was, like the performers, of British descent, despite the considerable difference in time? Was I 'closer' to a performance by the Ionian Singers in Soweto in 1970 because it took place in my lifetime, or more 'distant' because I had never been to Soweto and the performers belonged to a different 'race'? Did the fact that I was dealing with performances of *Messiah* automatically mean that I was dealing with my 'own' culture? Such questions reintroduce the issues of commonality and difference raised at the beginning of the Introduction, and I shall take them up again in the final chapter. Here I will simply say that the assumption which I hope has informed the

final form of the thesis has been that I am to varying degrees both an insider and an outsider to any context I might consider, depending on the attributes taken to be relevant. Too quick an assumption of either 'insider' or 'outsider' status – assuming that I did or did not know what was 'going on' or what meanings were being created, perhaps based on just one attribute shared or not shared between myself and the context in question – would lead me to overlook things to which the opposite assumption would have directed my attention.

For several performances that occupy important positions in my narrative, I have devoted considerable attention to attempting to establish that certain events happened in certain ways. This was because the available evidence seemed incomplete or contradictory. These are the most obvious points at which I have made use of more conventionally 'scientific' methods of historical research. Tomlinson quotes Isaiah Berlin's essay 'The Concept of Scientific History' to explain the appropriate place of such methods within a contextual approach: 'We can make use of the techniques of the natural sciences to establish dates, order events in time and space, exclude untenable hypotheses and suggest new explanatory factors' (1984: 355). Tomlinson points out that none of this constitutes an area somehow free of interpretation (ibid: 359) – there are no purely 'objective' facts – but I would add that interpretation of the kind that I have undertaken also depends on certain events having occurred rather than others. If meaning is contextual, its construction depends on knowing that specific elements were present in the relevant contexts. To take an obvious example, it may make a considerable difference to the meaning constructed for a particular performance of *Messiah* if it took place at the same time as a particular historical event, or before it, or some time after it. The date is not simply an irrelevant historical detail. Similarly, it may be important to establish whether or not a performance was in fact the first in a given context or not, both because constructing a performance as 'first' may have specific implications for its meaning, and because it has the potential to influence events that come after it.

The structure which I eventually gave to the thesis can be viewed in terms of the relative importance, at each level, of Thompson's four characteristics of social-historical contexts. At the broadest level, I have organized my material according to the fourth of these characteristics (social structure). The history of *Messiah* in South Africa has been shaped by the separations imposed by the broader socio-political history. I therefore tell, in effect, two separate stories, with the 'English' *Messiah* occupying Parts 1 and 2 of the thesis, the 'African' *Messiah* Parts 3 and 4. The scare quotes indicate that these labels, though necessary, are in various ways unsatisfactory, a matter I deal with briefly in the last section of this Introduction.

Within each of these broad categories, the material has been organized according to the first of Thompson's characteristics (spatio-temporal settings), since I generally follow the temporal unfolding of events, beginning in each case with the earliest performances of *Messiah* I have been able to discover. Parts 1 and 3 each end with the first complete performances of *Messiah* in their respective traditions. For the 'English' *Messiah*, a strictly chronological approach is, however, modified by a mode of organization referring primarily to spatial setting. Taking each of South Africa's main urban centres in turn, I have examined the first appearance of any item from *Messiah*, the first complete performance, and any other performances (falling within my time frame) that introduce significant contextual factors not present, or not

apparent, in earlier performances. For the 'African' *Messiah*, strict chronology is modified with reference to institutions and fields of interaction, and it is the significance of these which determines, for example, that my narrative begins in the Eastern Cape and ends in the townships of Johannesburg. In both cases, the purpose of the modification is to follow a certain phase of *Messiah*'s temporal trajectory through to completion in a particular place, institutional setting or field of interaction, even though it may overlap with the beginning of another such trajectory in a different place, institution or field.

The 'Hallelujah' Chorus is something of a constant in performances of *Messiah*. Not only is it the one piece that is hardly ever omitted, it is also the one piece that has been present throughout the South African history. It appears before any other items from *Messiah* in both the 'English' and 'African' stories, and I shall suggest that it has significantly influenced understandings of *Messiah* as a whole. I have therefore used it as my primary example for detailed analysis, considering how its attributes (including the accumulation of associations) articulate with the attributes of the various contexts in which it appears. Other items from *Messiah* are discussed where aspects of a particular performance context make them especially significant.

Matters of reference

Eracing

There are no labels used for referring to groups within the South African population that are entirely satisfactory and free from controversy. Racial classification, one of the detested features of the apartheid era, continues to play a contested role in the present. Although official forms frequently request information 'for statistical purposes only', the use to which these statistics are put can, as always, have personal, social and political consequences. On the understanding that such labels are always cultural constructions, one can acknowledge that they have real social meaning and have had profound formative effects on South African society (Keegan, 1996: viii-ix).

This recognition does not, however, solve the problem of which label to use to identify a particular group. 'The "English" *Messiah*': were the people who presented the performances I have discussed under this heading simply English-speakers? Since others also spoke English, should I add that they were white (thereby introducing a possibly untenable notion of 'race'), or perhaps that they traced their ancestry to Britain (thereby ignoring the possibility of assimilation)? I initially headed my second story 'The "Black" *Messiah*', but changed it because in the late apartheid era, and in post-apartheid South Africa, the term 'black' has frequently been used to include everyone discriminated against under the apartheid system (that is, everyone other than the people classified 'white'). Who then were the people whose performances are discussed under the heading 'The "African" *Messiah*'? Are they best described as those who traced their ancestry to the pre-colonial inhabitants of the region? Does that not imply some untenable notion of 'pure' descent, at least if the intention is to exclude people of mixed descent (who in South Africa are generally referred to as 'Coloured')? To what extent should I take account of the feeling amongst some in post-apartheid South Africa that the label 'African' should include people of any

ethnicity who are born in Africa and/or identify with it? Is it sufficient simply to say that I have used the categories operative in South African history?

For each of these tags, and the attempted definitions of them, there is (to borrow from Chinua Achebe) 'a meaning, and a penalty, and a responsibility' (quoted in Appiah, 1992: 173). I considered following the deconstructive approach and placing all such concepts 'under erasure' (~~white, African~~) to indicate that they are both impossible and necessary, that they can 'no longer be considered in the previous way, but without [them] certain key questions could not be considered at all' (Lehtonen, 2000: 135). Although I decided this might eventually try the reader's patience, I nevertheless intend my use of these terms to be taken in something of that spirit.

Quoting

Successive generations of South African officialdom referred to the African group as 'Kaffirs', 'Natives', 'Bantu', and 'Non-Europeans', and although these all in time came to be regarded as offensive (especially the first), I have not changed them where they appear in historical sources which I have quoted.

More generally, in quotations I have preserved the wording, spelling and punctuation of the original, as well as some typographical features (use of capitals, inverted commas or italics). Exceptions to this are the occasional addition of italics to highlight words of particular relevance in the immediate context of the quotation (these are always identified as such), and the translation of a few passages originally appearing in languages other than English.

Archival sources, Interviews, Newspapers

Although I recognize the usefulness of having a single list of references, I decided that in this case it was more useful to retain separate lists of primary sources (archival material, interviews, and newspaper articles) and secondary sources (books and journal articles). Where I have quoted from specific documents which I classify as 'archival sources', I indicate this following the reference, for example: (Ionian Music Society, 1969, archival source). The reader may then go directly to the list of archival sources for further details. Similarly, interviews are referenced according to the surname of the person interviewed, followed by the word 'interview', for example: (Mngoma interview, 1997a).

The thesis contains numerous quotations from newspapers. Rather than simply giving the titles of the newspapers consulted, I have provided a complete list of the items quoted, under the heading 'Historical Newspaper and Periodical References'. I have included here a small number of periodicals which contain contemporary reports on particular performances of *Messiah*, and which I have therefore treated as primary sources in the same way as newspapers. While I use the full name of the newspaper at its first appearance in the main text, I use abbreviated forms for many of the references. These abbreviations always begin with the same letter as the title of the newspaper, so it is a simple matter to look up the reference in the list of newspapers. In the list, the full title of the newspaper or periodical is given first (omitting 'the'), followed by any alternative name by which it may have been known for some part of its existence, and finally the abbreviation used. Thus, for example, the *South African*

Commercial Advertiser was also known for a time as the *South African Advertiser and Mail*. When I refer to the newspaper in the text I reproduce in full whichever name was currently in use, but I always keep to the same abbreviation (in this case, *SACA*).

PART 1: THE 'ENGLISH' MESSIAH 1

CHAPTER 2: First position – Hallelujah for Cape Town

The question most often asked by people on learning that my research topic is the South African history of Handel's *Messiah* has been, 'So when was the first performance?', closely followed by 'Where?' 'Being there first' is evidently seen as a matter of some importance. It stakes a claim for recognition of a significant achievement, with which people in the present may identify if some continuity can be constructed between themselves and those who went before (typically, membership of the same group or occupation of the same location). In some cases, those who are first are regarded as having won a real or imagined race. In other cases, they are conceived as pioneers worthy of admiration because typically they have had to encounter and overcome difficulties in a way that those who follow them do not, since they have the experience of the pioneers to build on. They may also be understood as founders, able to claim certain legitimate rights of ownership. Exclusive possession may indeed be disputed, but those who are 'there first' inevitably make their mark on a place, or a musical tradition, establishing a pattern that will tend to be observed by those who follow, and creating a specific set of associations that will tend to be carried into the future.

A long wait

When *Messiah* was first performed in Dublin in 1742, it is unlikely that Handel, or his audience, would have had anything but the vaguest awareness of that region of the world which was later to receive the name of 'South Africa'. It is equally unlikely that the inhabitants of this region would have had anything but the vaguest awareness of the existence of Handel, or of the diverse European musical traditions on which he drew in creating his English oratorios, and it was to be many years before there was much interest in increasing that awareness, or indeed opportunities for doing so. European settlement was confined to the South-Western Cape, and the predominant influence there was Dutch. The colony was under the control of the Dutch East India Company, and although its policies towards other European immigrants (mainly from France and Germany) changed over the years, their overall effect was to 'keep the settlement Dutch' (Giliomee, 2003: 10-12). The only urban centre of any size was Cape Town, and Hermann Giliomee's assessment of its cultural situation makes it clear that the prerequisites for anything like an oratorio performance were not to be found: 'Until the end of the Company period there was no high school, no theatre, no public hall of entertainment, no bookshop, and no newspaper. Most people did not read and public amusements were very few' (ibid: 28).

If Cape Town's general cultural climate did not provide an environment conducive to the appearance of *Messiah*, neither did the specifically musical climate. According to Jan Bouws's research on the early musical life of Cape Town, there is no evidence of

organised concerts before 1794 (1966: 64). Although there were signs of increasing musical activity in the second half of the eighteenth century, choral singing seems not to have been a significant part of this. In her thesis on the history of choral societies in Cape Town, Hanlie Van Niekerk follows Bouws's 1946 study, *Musiek in Suid-Afrika*, in suggesting that a tendency towards instrumental tuition and domestic performance which existed in the Netherlands was duplicated at the Cape (Van Niekerk, 1989: 4-5). As for music in the churches, Gawie Cillié points out that the Calvinist influence on the Dutch Reformed tradition, with its strong emphasis on congregational participation in singing, leaves little room for 'independent choral singing, that is for songs sung by a choir on behalf of the congregation' (1979: 26-7). During most of the period of the Dutch East India Company's rule at the Cape, it was only the Dutch Reformed Church that had permission to conduct public worship, although this was extended to the Lutherans in 1778 (Saunders & Southey, 2001 [1998]: 42). Referring to Reino Ottermann's research into the music of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Strand Street, Van Niekerk (1989: 7) states that the first formal 'choir' performance in Cape Town was by a boys' choir in that church on 10 December 1780. They sang 'the German *Te Deum* of Luther'.

The earliest record of any part of *Messiah* being performed in South Africa in fact dates from 1830, almost ninety years after its first performance in Dublin, and it was to be another thirty years before anything like a complete performance took place. It had appeared much earlier in such disparate parts of the colonial world as North America (1770s), India and Jamaica (both in the 1780s) (Luckett, 1992: 206-8). Ian Woodfield, in his study of music in Anglo-Indian society in the late eighteenth century, mentions a performance of *Messiah* in Calcutta in 1786 which was well received and, according to the *Calcutta Gazette*, 'the songs and recitatives would have been applauded on any theatre in Europe, and the management of the choruses exceeded every expectation' (quoted in Woodfield, 2000: 145).

The relevant differences between these colonial contexts and eighteenth-century Cape Town are their relatively larger and more settled urban populations, and the presence of the British. The latter is really the decisive factor, and not simply because *Messiah* had its origins in Britain: it was also there that it had been promoted to a unique position of prominence, along with its composer (whose origins were in fact in Germany). The various reasons for this will be discussed as they become relevant to particular aspects of the South African history. For the present, it is sufficient simply to note the phenomenon, taking as supporting evidence the following statement from a four-volume history of oratorio by Howard Smither: 'The power of the Handelian legacy in Britain could scarcely be overestimated ... From the composer's time on, wherever oratorios were heard throughout Britain, his works dominated the scene, and the ritualized *Messiah* was ubiquitous' (Smither, 2000: 249). That ubiquity would be reproduced wherever the British established themselves, as the following assertion made by Robert Manson Myers, in his cultural history of *Messiah*, suggests: 'Since its first appearance on 13 April 1742 Handel's *Messiah* has been performed more steadily in *English-speaking countries* than any other choral work in existence' (1948: xx, italics added).

It was only at the end of the eighteenth century that the British first turned their attention to the Cape. Even then, their purpose was not so much to turn it into a British colony as to protect the profitable trade route to India, fearing that the Dutch

might allow the Cape to fall into the hands of the French. In neither the first (1795) nor the second (1806) occupation of the Cape did Britain regard its presence as permanent, and there was at first little change in the way of life that the Dutch had established. It was only after the London Convention of 1814, when the Dutch formally ceded the Cape to Britain, that ‘the British swiftly established a stronger and more efficient colonial state, and remained the dominant power in southern Africa for the remainder of the 19th century’ (Saunders & Southey, 2001 [1998]:31).

The consequences of this for Cape Town were that by the 1830s, it had been transformed from ‘a backwater of the VOC empire’ to ‘the capital of an expanding British colony. New garrisons, administrators and immigrants altered the character of its population’ (Worden, Van Heyningen, & Bickford-Smith, 1998: 88). In 1821, Edward Blount could still comment that ‘an Englishman is reminded that he is not in his own country by the white-washed houses, the want of pavement and flags [i.e. flagstones] in the streets and a few other peculiarities’ (quoted in Worden, Van Heyningen, & Bickford-Smith, 1998: 112-3). By 1838, however, Ferdinand Krauss could refer to ‘the increasingly predominant English style’ of architecture (ibid: 117). Had Blount chosen to focus on music, he might have mentioned the absence of *Messiah* as one of the reminders that he was not in England, and while by 1838 it was still a rarity, Krauss might have considered its first appearance as one of the signs of increasing English influence. F.C.L. Bosman, whose research on the history of theatre and drama in South Africa touches on music at several points, dates the beginnings of the English contribution to musical activities in Cape Town to 1830 (Bosman, 1928: 521). He states that ‘almost all musical activity at the Cape in the first quarter of the [nineteenth] century was in the hands of Germans’, though ‘the chief supporters of the concerts remained the Dutch-speaking population’ (ibid: 520). This would seem to be confirmed by the list of occupations of Capetonians given in Worden et al. (1998: 94), which is based on statistics gathered by wardmasters in 1820. Six members from the Dutch/German population are listed as musicians, but none from the British population (which in any case made up only ten per cent of the free white population of the town at that stage (ibid: 89)).

Unravelling history: what happened in 1830?

By 1830, then, the British presence in Cape Town was sufficiently established to increase the likelihood of *Messiah*, or some part of it, receiving its first performance. It therefore comes as something of a surprise to discover that this in fact took place in the Dutch Reformed Church. (For the sake of simplicity, I follow Bouws in referring to this as the ‘Groote Kerk’, although the present church known by that name was in fact built some years later, on the same site.) Two reports in *The South African Commercial Advertiser* (SACA, 1830a; 1830b) state that the ‘Hallelujah’ chorus was performed at the services celebrating the dedication of a new organ for the church, on Sunday 11 July 1830.

Was it then after all the Dutch-Afrikaner community that was responsible for introducing *Messiah* to South Africa? They certainly provided the venue and the occasion, but the English community was also involved. Since 1807 the local Anglican congregation had been allowed to hold its services in the Groote Kerk, a situation which continued until 1834 when the Anglicans opened their own church, St

George's, the forerunner of the present Cathedral (Donaldson, 1994: 80). For the inauguration of the new organ at the Groote Kerk, then, both the Dutch and English congregations held special services. The Dutch service took place first and was followed by the English one, for which many of the Dutch congregation stayed on. Unfortunately, the existing reports of these events leave some room for doubt as to when, how and by whom 'Hallelujah' was performed. Since this performance takes 'first position' in my narrative, I shall discuss these reports in some detail.

The first one appeared on the Friday after the event in *De Zuid-Afrikaan*, a newspaper catering for the Dutch-speaking community. Describing the first (Dutch) service, it states that from time to time in the service there was choir music, both by the choir alone and together with the congregation, and it praises 'den Hr. Beil en den Hr. Logier' for their work in this regard. It mentions that at the end of the service there was 'orchestmuzyk' ('band music'). Going on to discuss the second (English) service somewhat more briefly, it again refers to choral singing and contributions by a band, which in this instance is named as that of the 72nd Regiment, and it comments that when playing with the band the full power of the organ could be heard. What this report does not do is identify any of the musical items performed.

The following day a report appeared in *The South African Commercial Advertiser* by 'A Correspondent' who was 'present ... during the English service' (1830a). While it does not, therefore, extend our knowledge of the first service, it does give detailed information about the music at the second service. It states that the choir had 'been formed and instructed by Mr Corder'. Thomas Corder had been appointed organist to the Anglican congregation in 1829, and according to Bouws he formed an 'Episcopal Church Choral Society' which had its first outing on Christmas Day that year (1966: 99). This appears to have been the first choir formed from within the English-speaking community of Cape Town. Bouws assumes that this is the choir that took part in the service on 11 July, though the report does not specifically name it as such. The choir that sang at the service appears to have been an all-male choir, since the report states that the anthem (a setting of Psalm 98 by Corder himself) 'was sung by the gentlemen of the Choir' and suggests that a certain lack of power in the 'Treble' could be overcome 'by the introduction of a few female voices'.

In any event, it is only this anthem that the report explicitly describes as having been sung by the choir. Bouws, having mentioned the anthem, goes on immediately to say that the 'Hallelujah' chorus 'concluded the service' (ibid.), the implication therefore being that the choir would have sung it. This perfectly reasonable assumption, which I initially shared, has subsequently featured both in formal academic contexts such as the previously-mentioned thesis by Van Niekerk (1989: 14) and in more informal ones such as the programme notes for a performance of *Messiah* (Philharmonia Choir of Cape Town, 1996, archival source). However, on closer reading of the original report, I noticed that the choir is not actually mentioned in relation to the 'Hallelujah' chorus. This is the relevant passage:

At the conclusion of Divine Service the Solemn impressive Overture of "Zaira" by Winter, and the grand peculiar style of the Overture to "Joseph," by Mehul, were exceedingly well performed by the Band and Organ combined; and the musical treat concluded with the grand Hallelujah Chorus, from Handle's [sic] "Messiah," which was executed in the true spirit of the eminent

Composer - the Organ blending so completely with the Band as to produce a majesty of harmonious sound almost indescribable.

(SACA, 1830a)

The fact that only organ and band are mentioned here, while the choir is only mentioned in connection with the Anthem, suggests that the 'Hallelujah' chorus was performed in an instrumental version, thereby conforming with all the rest of the music performed before and after the service. It also seems doubtful whether Corder would have considered it wise to pit a small choir of men and boys against the 'majesty of harmonious sound' produced by the organ and band together, especially given the comment made in the report about a lack of power.

A further complication arises from the recognition that the word 'band' was sometimes applied more broadly to any group of performers, including singers. In 1832 there is a reference in the *Commercial Advertiser* to a 'Choral Band' (Van Niekerk, 1989: 14, n. 36); in Grahamstown a few years later a group performing some of the *Messiah* choruses was described as the 'Amateur Band' (see below: 45); from across the Atlantic comes a description of a concert in Philadelphia in 1786 which ended 'with the exertions of the full band' in the performance of 'Hallelujah' – the 'band' on this occasion consisting of 230 vocal and 50 instrumental performers (R. M. Myers, 1948: 252). It is therefore possible that the above description does not refer to a band in the narrower sense of the word; but the presence of such a band on this occasion, and the reference immediately before to the same forces performing pieces (the Overtures) which would certainly not have been sung, are still in favour of the interpretation that 'Hallelujah' was given an instrumental performance.

Against this stands a third report, which appeared the following week, again in the *South African Commercial Advertiser*. It contains the following statement: 'at the conclusion, the Hallelujah Chorus, the music of which is taken from Handel's "Messiah," was sung by the choir with great enthusiasm and spirit' (SACA, 1830b). Unlike the other two reports, this one does not specifically mention the fact that there were two separate services, although the details given seem mainly to refer to the first service. In fact, most of the report seems to be based on the account that had appeared in *De Zuid-Afrikaan* (several passages are almost direct translations). Beil and Logier are praised for their work in 'forming and instructing a choir of ladies and gentlemen', and while a further name is added to theirs (that of Grondeler, who was the organist of the Groote Kerk), Thomas Corder and his all-male choir are not mentioned. If the report is indeed discussing the first service only, this would imply that the choir from the Dutch community had sung the 'Hallelujah' chorus at the end. The report's use of the phrase 'at the conclusion' in relation to the performance of 'Hallelujah' is ambiguous. If it refers to the last music played at the first service, it contradicts *De Zuid-Afrikaan*'s statement that there was band music as the people left the church, but it could simply refer to the last thing that happened in the service proper, before the people left.

However, the phrase also echoes the first SACA report's statement that 'the musical treat concluded' with the 'Hallelujah' chorus, and this is just one of several details towards the end of the third report which suggest that the writer has drawn from the earlier one in the SACA, or possibly that they were written by the same person. Most obvious is the use of the phrase 'almost indescribable majesty of sounds', which can be compared with the 'majesty of harmonious sound almost indescribable' already

quoted above. A later sentence, stating that ‘at intervals during the Service some beautiful Overtures were introduced, which displayed to great advantage the grandeur of the Organ’, appears to combine *De Zuid-Afrikaan*’s references to choral and band music with the first *SACA* report’s references to overtures. Since there were in fact two services, the reference simply to ‘the Service’ leaves open the possibility that either is being discussed.

It therefore seems possible that the third report has been cobbled together from the two previously published reports, perhaps without the writer having been personally present, and that some of the details have become muddled as the descriptions of the two services were conflated. Why then was the third report published at all? It may simply have been because the earlier *SACA* report had not described the Dutch service and it was felt to be important not to ignore it. Another possibility is suggested by small differences in the titles of the two *SACA* reports. The first one is headed ‘Opening of the New Organ at the Reformed Church’. The second one inserts the word ‘Dutch’ before ‘Reformed’ and adds ‘at Cape Town’ at the end. Since these additions hardly seem necessary for a local audience, they might suggest that this further report had been written primarily for consumption elsewhere, but still printed in the local edition. In any event, on this reading the third report has carelessly made the assumption that ‘Hallelujah’ was among the choral items, whereas in fact it was played by the organ and band at the second service only. This conclusion is borne out by the fact that the printed order for the Dutch service, which has been preserved at the Groote Kerk, makes no mention of the ‘Hallelujah’ chorus, though the other choral items are listed, and their words printed (Groote Kerk, 1830, archival source).

Although this seems to me the most probable scenario, the possibility that the choir also sang the piece at the end of the first service cannot be ruled out entirely. Of the three musicians whose names are mentioned in connection with the choir that sang on this occasion, it is Frederick Logier whose connections to England and to the English community in Cape Town make him the most likely to have introduced Handel into the proceedings. He was born in Ireland of German parents, which links him both to Handel’s country of birth and the country in which *Messiah* received its first performance. He would have had opportunities to hear *Messiah* during the time he spent with his family both in Germany and (more particularly) in London. On his arrival in Cape Town he opened an Academy of Music with the English music dealer E.K. Green, and later married Green’s sister-in-law. It may not be entirely without significance that (in the same year as the performance of ‘Hallelujah’ at the Groote Kerk) Logier’s name was directly linked with Handel’s in the christening of a nephew as Willem George Fredrik Handel Logier Berning! (Bouws, 1966: 18-24).

More prominent as a choir trainer, however, was Ludwig Heinrich Beil. He was a recent German immigrant, and although *Messiah* did not have the unique status in Germany which it enjoyed in England, it was still by this time being performed with sufficient frequency (see Smither, 2000: 17) for it to have been known to Beil, making it possible that he was responsible for the choice, perhaps in consultation with Logier. According to Bouws (ibid: 101), Beil’s name first appears in connection with the celebration of the Augsburg Confession at the Lutheran Church on 27 June 1830, at which he, together with Logier, directed a ‘Muzyk- en Koorzang-Gezelschap’. Since this was a mere two weeks before the Groote Kerk event, it seems highly likely that it

was the same group (almost certainly including both Dutch- and German-speaking members) that sang there.

The basic questions posed at the beginning of this chapter (When and where was the first performance?) have thus been answered, to the extent that they can be. While the possibility obviously cannot be ruled out that some excerpt from *Messiah* might have been performed prior to the Groote Kerk event – for example, an amateur singer presenting one of the well-known arias at a private gathering – this is as far as the documentary evidence will take us: the earliest recorded appearance of *Messiah* (or at least of its most famous excerpt) was in 1830, in Cape Town. However, it seems impossible finally to establish whether it was played by the Band of the His Majesty's 72nd Regiment with Thomas Corder at the organ, or sung by the choir of Dutch and German singers, conducted and accompanied by one or other of the musicians responsible for the music at the first service: Beil, Logier and Grondeler.

It can nevertheless be said with some certainty that the first sung performance of 'Hallelujah' was indeed by a choir of Dutch and German singers. If it was not in 1830, then it was at the next documented performance (mentioned by Van Niekerk, 1989: 22). Once again, it marks a special occasion: this time, the opening of the new Dutch Reformed Church (the present Groote Kerk) on Sunday 31 January 1841. A report in *Het Nederduitsch Zuid-Afrikaansch Tydschrift* (1841: 155) specifically states that the choir ('zangkoor') sang 'Het Halleluja Chorus'. It identifies the conductor (Beil), but not the choir. By 1832 Beil was directing a choral group with the name 'Harmonie en Eendragt', which appeared on special occasions in several churches as well as at public concerts (Bouws, 1966: 100-105). It is likely, as Van Niekerk assumes, that this was the group that sang at the Groote Kerk in 1841.

It seems that the Dutch continued to be the leaders in the area of choral music through the 1840s, a situation which Bouws attributes to the work of Beil (1966: 105). At the same time, there was considerable contact with the English community, including attendance at one another's church services. The fact that the Anglicans cancelled their morning service at St George's in favour of attending the ceremony at the Groote Kerk (*SACA*, 1841) suggests that friendly relations continued despite the physical separation of the two congregations. The traffic went the other way also: a German observer noted that many Dutch and German inhabitants 'seem to regard it as refined to visit the English church as well' (quoted in Worden, Van Heyningen, & Bickford-Smith, 1998: 123). This makes the early association of 'Hallelujah' with the Dutch Reformed Church less surprising than it might otherwise have seemed. It is worth noting that Cillié (1979: 27) cites English influence as an explanation for the very existence of so 'un-Reformed' an institution as a choir in the South African DRC. The specific experience of the 1830 event may be relevant here. It is possible that amongst those who stayed on for the English service were the musicians, including Beil and Logier. It can only be a speculation, but perhaps not an entirely far-fetched one, that as they listened to the band and organ playing 'Hallelujah', their sense of its appropriateness to such festive occasions was strengthened, and that discussing it subsequently a resolve was formed that on some future occasion their singers would perform it. English ideas about what was proper for occasions of public celebration, and in the field of church music more generally, may thus have been adopted in a similar way to the 'English ideas as to how sacred space should be conceived' which Robert Ross discusses in accounting for the otherwise surprising adherence to Gothic

rather than Reformed styles of most Dutch Reformed churches built in the Cape Colony after the middle of the nineteenth century (Ross, 1999b: 108).

At this time, Afrikaner leaders in Cape Town tended to ‘downplay cultural differences to avoid the impression of any rift between the two white groups’, both in order to achieve common goals and also so that they would be treated on equal terms, appealing to ‘the common rights which all British subjects shared’ (Giliomee, 2003: 198). Christoffel Brand complained in 1837 that while the Afrikaners at the Cape had done everything to prove they were British, ‘their conquerors had continually worked to remind them that they were Hollanders’ (quoted in Giliomee, 2003: 199). In 1841 he wrote: ‘[We] are two who must become one and by doing so raise the banner of unanimity in public affairs.’ Having quoted this statement, Giliomee wryly adds: ‘English commentators left little doubt that this “unanimity” would increasingly be expressed in English cultural terms’ (ibid: 199).

What is beginning to emerge here is a socio-historical context characterized by British hegemony. Within this context, a famous piece of English music was sung by a Dutch-German choir on an important occasion in the life of the Dutch Reformed Church, which was also attended by members of the English church. Could it have been received, by at least some listeners, as both a demonstration and a celebration of a certain ‘unanimity’ between English and Afrikaner? Although the documentary record provides us with nothing beyond the bare statement that the ‘Hallelujah’ Chorus was performed, what we know of the immediate performance context and the broader socio-historical context suggest this possibility as one of the music’s social meanings on this occasion. In the next section, I shall return to the somewhat fuller reports of the 1830 event, since they provide details that make it possible to begin unravelling the various layers of meaning that might have been present in these first performances.

Unravelling meaning: ‘Hallelujah’ as status (and) symbol

Many of the reasons for *Messiah*’s later prominence, and many of the associations which informed later constructions of its meaning, can already be seen in embryonic form in this event. In introducing some of these, sufficient evidence will already be available to enable me to carry the relevant interpretations forward into discussions of subsequent performances, where I will therefore not repeat what I have said here. In other cases, I will be able to do no more than suggest a possibility that may (or may not) be confirmed by the more detailed and explicit evidence that emerges from the discussion of later performances.

The first point may seem so obvious that its significance is easy to overlook: only an excerpt from *Messiah* was heard on these occasions, and that excerpt was the ‘Hallelujah’ chorus. The appearance of ‘Hallelujah’ as a separate item dates back as far as 1758, when it was performed at London’s Festival of the Sons of the Clergy (Burrows, 1991: 49, 115 n. 11). Richard Lockett (1992: 207) notes the ‘separate existence’ that the chorus had attained by the end of the eighteenth century, both in Britain and in North America. In view of this, it is not surprising that it now appears in such a way in Cape Town, detached from the rest of the oratorio. There is, however, a difference that may be worth highlighting: in England, its separate

existence followed its appearance as part of the whole work, whereas in Cape Town (and elsewhere in South Africa in subsequent years) it preceded any performance of the complete oratorio. The fact that it was thus the first (and perhaps for some time the only) excerpt to be performed, increases the possibility that when the complete work was eventually heard, understandings of it may have been significantly influenced by the already established image of ‘Hallelujah’, and the meanings which this chorus was understood to convey.

What were the components of the image which its separate performance had provided for ‘Hallelujah’? Luckett (*ibid*) refers to its use as ‘an obligatory party piece’ and (because of its ‘aptness as a finale’) as a concluding item on a variety of different occasions. This implies that it was a piece which could be used to show off the talents of the performers; that there was frequently an expectation that it should be performed; and that it was felt to be an especially appropriate way of concluding the proceedings to which it contributed. Jens Peter Larsen notes that ‘by innumerable performances out of its context, this chorus has come to be accepted as a piece of general festive music that can be used anywhere, and never ineffectively’ (Larsen, 1989 [1972]: 168). As a result, it has been heard not in terms of the specific role it plays in the overall structural plan of *Messiah* but variously as ‘a general confession to the Almighty God who reigns eternally’, or as ‘a general eulogy’, or even as a generalized ‘rejoicing’ (*ibid*). (I assume Larsen uses the word ‘confession’ to mean ‘statement of faith’ rather than ‘acknowledgement of sin’.) Each of the features mentioned by these writers is relevant to this performance (as well as to many others in later years), and will be enlarged upon in what follows.

The chorus was not only well-known, but was also given a position of uniquely high status. Luckett amusingly juxtaposes two contrasting quotations from accounts of *Messiah*, which nevertheless both testify to the unique position of ‘Hallelujah’, in the way they announce the arrival of something special: “‘It is not easy to speak of it”, says Haweis; “I hasten to speak of it”, says Burney’ (Luckett, 1992: 102). Luckett also quotes the anonymous author of *An Examination of the Oratorios which have been performed this season* (1763), who ‘resolutely refused to admit that any number was beyond criticism’, but was nevertheless forced to concede that this chorus was ‘truly striking and sublime, by the most perfect conduct it rises by degrees to the utmost pitch of sublimity and pathos’ (*ibid*).

The prestige of ‘Hallelujah’ also derived from (and contributed towards) the high esteem in which *Messiah*, Handel, and the genre of oratorio had come to be held in nineteenth-century Britain. As early as 1758, the poet William Shenstone, after hearing *Messiah* performed at the Three Choirs Festival in Worcester, expressed the opinion that ‘It seems the best composer’s best composition’ (quoted in Dean, 1959: 137). An article in the English periodical *Musical World*, published in 1838, states that Handel ‘is the greatest of composers’, specifically because he is ‘the most successful writer in the highest department of the art’, and immediately mentions *Messiah* as standing ‘on the pinnacle of fame’. In another issue of the same periodical, published in 1862, oratorio is described as ‘undoubtedly the highest, the most sublime form of musical composition’ (both articles quoted in Smither, 2000: 254, 264). ‘Hallelujah’ thus came to be viewed (in Britain) as the greatest chorus in the greatest oratorio by the greatest composer of the greatest genre. This is a formidable example of what the historian Michael Pickering refers to as the ‘hierarchical ranking of

aesthetic tastes', which he suggests always invites exploration of the extent to which it might 'endorse as well as embody positions of social privilege and structures of social disadvantage' (Pickering, 1997: 61), a point to which we shall return shortly (and repeatedly in the course of this study).

The two reports of the 1830 Groote Kerk event which refer to 'Hallelujah' do give it particular prominence amongst the various musical items that were performed. It is the only piece deemed worthy of being mentioned by name in the second of these reports, and both reports emphasise its position at the end of the proceedings, reinforcing the idea that it provided a fitting musical climax. For the writers of these reports, it also provides a rhetorical climax for their accounts of the music (in the first one it elicits the purple passage about 'indescribable majesty'). Amongst the various composers whose names are mentioned, the status of Handel alone is marked by the use of an adjective, 'eminent'.

When a writer in one context duplicates ideas, or even specific phrases, which are or have been current in other contexts, it is always difficult to disentangle the extent to which that writer is responding independently to the same stimulus (in this case, the music of the 'Hallelujah' chorus) or is reproducing, even unconsciously, what has been read or heard elsewhere. The two possibilities are, of course, not mutually exclusive: the present stimulus may confirm the aptness of the existing discourse that surrounds it, or the discourse may predispose the writer to 'process' the immediate stimulus in accordance with it. It is always possible that on this occasion the musical experience itself simply made a deeper impression on the writer of the report than that afforded by the other pieces performed. At the same time, it seems quite likely (especially given the description of Handel as an 'eminent composer') that the writer would have been well aware of the high profile of Handel, *Messiah*, and 'Hallelujah' that had already been established in England (as well as the specific role of the chorus as a 'grand' finale), and that this would have made its performance particularly worthy of mention. For those listeners at the Groote Kerk (probably the majority) who did not share this awareness, the report, in conjunction with their memory of the performance, would have begun to create a similar impression in their minds of the status of the chorus, the oratorio, and the composer.

The word 'grand', used to describe 'Hallelujah' in the first *SACA* report, was of course a frequently used adjective, and perhaps not too much significance should be attached to it as evidence for a particular understanding of the chorus on this occasion. In the same report it is applied also to the style of the Mehul overture, and it was commonly used in advertisements for concerts of all kinds: when the Miranda-Harper Company visited Cape Town in 1868 and 1869, advertisements appeared for a 'Grand Fashionable Concert' (*SACA*, 1868), a 'Grand Operatic Performance' (*SACA*, 1869), a 'Grand Ballad Concert', (*ibid*), and a 'Grand Sacred Festival' (at which *Messiah* was performed – see below: 86) (*CA*, 1869b). Even the advertisement for the first performance of *Messiah* in Dublin had called it 'Mr Handel's new Grand Oratorio' (Luckett, 1992: 121). Nevertheless, despite this somewhat indiscriminate usage, the habitual attachment of the word to 'Hallelujah' (the *SACA* report being an instance) does seem to have both reflected, and contributed towards the reinforcement of, a particular image of the chorus's status, character and significance. Indeed, 'Hallelujah' was sometimes referred to not by name but simply as 'the grand chorus' from *Messiah* (for example, on the occasion of its first performance in Philadelphia in

1772 (R. M. Myers, 1948: 252)), as though this description alone was sufficient to identify it.

The writer may have been reproducing this more general usage, or the word may have come to mind in response to the directly perceived features of the music: the ‘massiveness’ of the homophonic sections, for example, or the impression of complexity (and therefore ‘intellectual weight’) given by the polyphonic sections, or the sheer volume of sound produced by organ and band together. For whatever reason, the writer used this word rather than any other, and thus contributed in however small a way to the ongoing process of shaping the discourse of *Messiah*.

A ‘grand’ chorus would obviously be appropriate for a ‘grand’ occasion. The music would contribute its own grandeur to that of the occasion, and the listeners’ sense of the music’s grandeur would be enhanced by that of the occasion. This reciprocal process would increase the probability of the music appearing as a desirable choice for subsequent occasions of a similar kind. How was this occasion seen? The following discussion will show that it could indeed be described as a ‘grand’ occasion, at least as seen from the perspective of Cape Town society in the early nineteenth century.

The most obvious indicator of this is the sheer number of people who attended the event. All three reports remark on this: ‘The congregation was so numerous, that notwithstanding a material addition of seats, a great proportion of them were under the necessity of standing’ (*SACA*, 1830b). Much the same statement appears in *De Zuid-Afrikaan*, while the other *SACA* report estimates that at one point ‘there must have been a congregation in the Church of about 1,600 persons (1830a). In a town which at that time had a total white population of approximately 10,000 (Worden, Van Heyningen, & Bickford-Smith, 1998: 89), this represents a very substantial proportion that would have heard the ‘Hallelujah’ Chorus.

It was not only a matter of numbers, however. This was clearly also an occasion on which social hierarchy was on display, and on which the elite of the Colony could enact and celebrate their position at the top of the social hierarchy. Two of the reports highlight the presence of several persons from the highest social stratum: ‘The ceremony was honoured by the presence of his Excellency the Governor [Sir Lowry Cole] and Lady Frances Cole with their family and suite; the Chief Justice and one of the Judges of the Supreme Court, and several other persons of distinction’ (*SACA*, 1830b). Here then are the leading representatives of two of the primary locations of direct social power, or what Louis Althusser termed ‘repressive state apparatuses’ (see J. B. Thompson, 1990: 92): the government and the courts. By implication a third, the military, was also present, since the Governor and the military had become more or less synonymous, not only because the Governor ultimately commanded the armed forces but also because almost all the Governors (until 1854) were in fact British military officers (Ross, 1999b: 41). There was also, of course, the presence of the regimental band, as another reminder of the fact that ‘the army, with the Governor at its head, was always a major presence’ (Ross, 1999b: 7).

The simple fact that ‘Hallelujah’ was played on this occasion by a military band would in a straightforward and immediate sense have drawn it into the sphere of military-supported power, but this is not all. The musical materials of ‘Hallelujah’

give it a somewhat march-like character. When played by a military band, the likelihood of its being heard precisely *as* a quasi-military march must be greatly increased. This in turn makes possible a connection between these enhanced military connotations and the other connotations surrounding the piece, thereby creating or reinforcing a (by no means necessary or inevitable) continuity between the military on the one hand, and celebration, social status and (as will be seen shortly) Christianity on the other.

The performance of ‘Hallelujah’ is described using the word ‘majesty’ (*SACA*, 1830a). Given the caution expressed above with regard to making too much out of a single word, the description does at least suggest the possibility of an association between the music and those who occupy positions of power in society, which again goes beyond the simple fact that they were present on the same occasion (though this is in itself not without significance, especially since it was so often the case with performances of *Messiah*). Of course, the use of the word ‘majesty’ cannot by itself be taken to demonstrate that any such association was actually made on this occasion; but neither can the possibility simply be ruled out, of a reciprocal relationship developing between the perceived ‘majesty’ of the music (and that of its reputation), the ‘majesty’ of the divine being which it praises, the ‘majesty’ of the event, and the ‘majesty’ of the personages who were present, many of whom represented, ultimately, the ‘majesty’ of the British monarch. At present this can only be a suggestion, but I hope it will gain in plausibility as it is explored more fully in relation to later examples which provide richer material for interpretation (see below, especially Chapter 9).

Although its primary purpose was the dedication of the organ, a further dimension of this event’s importance in the community was the fact that it seems to have taken on something of the character of a music festival, an occasion on which the musical resources of the town could be displayed and heard. The first *SACA* report speaks of ‘the expectation which had been so much excited’ by the event, and the fact that it afforded ‘such general pleasure and satisfaction’ (1830a). It seems possible that it was not simply a matter of the musical items being enjoyable, but that the satisfaction stemmed in part from seeing them as markers of a more general progress on the part of the community (for more explicit evidence of this interpretation, see below: 40). The status of the ‘Hallelujah’ Chorus fitted it particularly well for the role of *demonstrating* the town’s ability to rise to a significant musical challenge. Simultaneously, its musical character (as a generalised ‘festive’ piece) fitted it for the role of *celebrating* that level of achievement (and the cultural progress of which it was a marker). This would have resonated well with plans (frequently discussed in the *SACA*) to improve both the physical townscape and the human population in such a way as to demonstrate that the Colony was fully worthy of the self-government that was sought (Worden, Van Heyningen, & Bickford-Smith, 1998: 134) and would eventually be granted in 1853.

The end of *De Zuid-Afrikaan*’s report introduces an idea closely related to that of celebration, that of thanksgiving (‘een dankbaar gevoel’), which was aroused by the music. Gratitude might have been directed towards the musicians, and towards the donor of the new organ, but also and perhaps primarily towards God, all these benefits being seen as a sign of divine favour. This is another theme to which I will return on several occasions, but there is evidence even within these reports of the links

understood to exist between God and earthly prosperity: Jan Hoets is credited with donating the new organ ‘as a token of gratitude to the Almighty for the prosperity which he has experienced in this Colony for a series of years’ and in the sermon the minister ‘prayed for Heaven’s reward, as well temporal as eternal, for such amiable generosity’ (*SACA*, 1830b). The ‘Hallelujah’ chorus would have seemed a singularly apt expression of this whole cluster of ideas. On the one hand, some may already have been familiar with the understanding of it in terms of generalised ‘rejoicing’, while others may have come to such an understanding through their experience on this occasion of the musical elements which led to this construction, such as the major key and the excitement suggested by the constant reiterations of the ‘Hallelujah’ motive. On the other hand, there is the more specific association with ‘praising God’: whether or not the text was actually sung, that is the literal meaning contained in the title. At the same time, the construction of the whole event in terms of such ideas as rejoicing, celebration, praise and thanksgiving would have facilitated a similar construction of the music, reinforcing existing associations or creating them for those hearing the music for the first time, and thereby making particular meanings available for mobilisation on subsequent occasions.

The Christian associations present in the title of the chorus, and that of the work from which it is taken, would naturally have been heightened by its performance as part of a church service. Christianity was an essential element in the self-understanding of the majority of European settlers, and also not entirely without relevance for the questions of status and power raised in the preceding discussion. Not only was Christianity itself, in the colonial context and particularly for the Afrikaners, both ‘a source of social power’ (Ross, 1999b: 95) and a ‘status marker’ (Keegan, 1996: 84), but the two particular forms of Christianity most prominently represented at the Groote Kerk were also those most closely associated with the elite of the Colony. The English congregation was specifically an ‘Anglican’ one, and in the Colony as in Britain, Anglicanism was an ‘established church’. Timothy Keegan (1996: 83) associates Anglicanism with the rulers of the colony in the early nineteenth century (in explicit contrast with Nonconformists), while Worden et al. (1998: 123) refer to ‘the association of the Anglican Church with the British establishment’ in Cape Town in the 1830s. As for the Dutch Reformed Church, it not only retained its earlier status for the Dutch-Afrikaner population but had also been retained as an established church by the British rulers (Giliomee, 2003: 199).

If the separate services point to the British/Dutch-Afrikaner division within the society, the circumstances of the event as a whole, and the way it is represented, serve rather to emphasise friendly relations between the two communities. The first *SACA* report remarks that ‘it was gratifying to see a large concourse of our Dutch friends remain during the whole time of our Divine Service’ (1830a). This is significant because part of my argument in this study is that *Messiah*’s prominence in South Africa is the result of British hegemony. I have already referred, more loosely, to the British ‘presence’ and ‘influence’, and this is undeniably an important element in the proceedings. It appears directly in the performance of ‘Hallelujah’ by the British organist and band, less directly in the (possible) performance by the Dutch-German choir, but nevertheless mediated by the involvement of Logier, a musician with strong ties to Britain. I have also referred to the reminders of direct (military-political) British domination of the colony. However, it is the supporting role played by factors in the broader socio-historical context affecting the relationship between the two

communities that I want to highlight by introducing the more specific term ‘hegemony’.

I intend to indicate by this both the presence of a dominant power with the ability, if necessary, to impose its political will and its culture, but at the same time an initial acceptance of that domination and an internalisation of that culture on the part of significant segments of the Afrikaner community (and, as will become apparent later, of the African community as well). It was, at least in part, this British hegemony which allowed *Messiah* to cross so successfully from its British source to other communities, a process without which it would not have achieved the wider social reach that it did. Although, as noted in the Introduction, the further history of the ‘Afrikaans’ *Messiah* will not be treated in this thesis, the involvement of the Dutch-Afrikaner community in these first performances of ‘Hallelujah’ invites a brief consideration of their relationship with the English community at this time.

Divisions between the groups were certainly not as clear-cut as later antagonisms might suggest. Perhaps the difficulty of unravelling the identity of the performers of the ‘Hallelujah’ Chorus on this occasion could be seen as symbolic of the complexity of this relationship. So, too, could the figure of Abraham Faure, the minister of the Groote Kerk who presided at the Dutch service. He edited a Dutch magazine, *Het Nederduitsch Zuid-Afrikaansch Tijdschrift (NZAT)*, which proposed a dual identity for the Afrikaner colonists. ‘The burghers had to be loyal British subjects, but also identify with their particular history and cultural distinctiveness’ (Giliomee, 2003: 195). On a later occasion, while visiting the Voortrekkers in Natal, Faure made himself unpopular by proposing a toast to Queen Victoria. Giliomee remarks on a more general tendency amongst the Reformed clergy to ‘remain loyal to the government of the day as part of a God-willed social order’ (ibid: 204).

In the wider society, while there were some who sought to promote an Afrikaner identity and preserve their Dutch heritage, by the early 1830s there was already a distinct stratum known as the Cape Dutch or “Anglomen” (ibid: 198). Giliomee quotes one of their principal representatives, Henry Cloete, as stating in 1831: ‘The Cape Dutch were essentially English. Their habits, their intermarriage, their general improvements, all exhibit and prove this fact’ (ibid). This group, too, constituted an elite: Giliomee characterises it as an ‘upper stratum’, consisting of those who were the ‘best-educated’ (ibid: 193, 198). There was also enthusiasm on the part of some in the English community for unity amongst the colonists, an example being John Fairbairn, editor of the *SACA* (Keegan, 1996: 99). Giliomee notes that in one of its first editions the *SACA* ‘called for an end to “national distinctions and loyalties” and for the “cordial and complete amalgamation of the Dutch and English colonists which is so ... essential to the future interests and well-being of both”’ (2003: 196).

There was of course direct pressure from the British on the Dutch community in the form of a policy of anglicization affecting many areas of life (ibid: 197), but there was also the less direct, if hardly more subtle, pressure stemming from the tendency of the English to regard their way of doing things as superior. Giliomee quotes a remark by the colonial secretary W.W. Bird, writing in 1822 about ‘the Englishman’s conviction that “nothing can be right or proper that is not English, and to which he is unaccustomed”’ (2003: 194). This Englishness was becoming ‘the dominant ideology in urban life’, and was embodied in a range of cultural expressions. Giliomee

specifically mentions language, dress, architecture and food, but music must surely have taken its place alongside these. It seems likely that the involvement of a significant (elite) segment of the Dutch-Afrikaans population in aspects of English culture would have provided a social context facilitating, acceptance of, and even identification with, the 'Hallelujah' Chorus. This helps to explain its selection for performance in a context which was clearly not 'purely' British, and also suggests that it symbolized the participation of the Afrikaners in the culture that had become dominant in this social setting. This was not simply a matter of indicating the Afrikaners' willingness to cooperate with the British in the interests of achieving their own and shared goals, as was suggested in relation to the 1840 performance (see above: 30). It symbolized their understanding of themselves as members of the broader society, representing the 'English' component of the 'dual identity' proposed by Faure.

For the English colonists, the prominent place allotted to 'Hallelujah' on these occasions might have provided gratifying confirmation of their sense of superiority, which would only have been reinforced to the extent that they were aware of its status as the 'greatest' music in existence. The explicit deployment of *Messiah* on behalf of Englishness was to become much more marked in the later part of the century (for example, see below: 90). Perhaps the only hint of it here lies in the statement that 'Hallelujah' was performed in 'the true spirit of the eminent composer'. Without wishing to hang too much on such a small detail, this does suggest a 'spiritual' link between the performers and the composer, which may also, in these circumstances, have some significance as a sign of the existence and strength of a link between the cultural life of the colonial community and that of England. (Of course, it might also simply have been used as a stock phrase of approval for describing such a performance.)

Before leaving this first performance, a thought may be directed towards those who are not represented in this scene of celebration. People of European descent (Dutch, German, English) appear in the accounts, but not the Khoi and the ethnically diverse slave (or ex-slave) populations who also lived in Cape Town and the surrounding areas. Whether or not a few members of these latter groups might have heard (or overheard) the music, a reminder of their existence reinforces the point that, at this stage, 'Hallelujah' was exclusively the music of an elite which was defined also in racial terms. In another part of the country, within just over thirty years from *Messiah*'s first appearance in Cape Town, this would no longer be true. Before turning to that development, however, we will trace *Messiah*'s gradual spread in the various British settler communities.

CHAPTER 3: ‘And everywhere the British went, “Messiah” was sure to go’ – excerpts, 1845-1863

In the years between the first performances of ‘Hallelujah’ and the first complete performance of *Messiah* in South Africa in 1863, the performance of excerpts follows closely the pattern of British settlement. There are further performances in Cape Town, but also in the Eastern Cape and in Natal.

Cape Town: occasions for fundraising

Bouws’s (1966) research on the early musical life of Cape Town ends at 1850. Although he found scattered references to the continued existence of Thomas Corder’s Episcopal Church Choral Society (see above: 26), the choir seems to have struggled for support and Bouws does not mention any further public performances having been given by it after 1830, nor indeed by any other choir from within the English community. The three performances discussed below were all given by amateur performers brought together for the occasion rather than by established choirs, and all (in addition to the musical interest they provided) had the objective of raising funds for a particular cause. The first performance is mentioned by Bouws, the remaining two (which fall outside his time frame) by Bosman (1928).

For the Roman Catholic Church, 1846

In its third recorded appearance in Cape Town, *Messiah* was yet again represented by the ‘Hallelujah’ Chorus. On this occasion the context was not a service but a concert, though still taking place in a church building (the Roman Catholic Chapel in Bouquet Street), and advertised as ‘A Selection of Sacred Music’ (*SACA*, 1846). The event was in aid of the fund for completing the new Catholic Church (the present St Mary’s Cathedral) and took place on 21 September 1846. Tickets were available at five shillings each, and according to a report in *Sam Sly’s African Journal* (1846) 324 tickets were sold, realizing a sum of £81: the Chapel was ‘crowded’. This report included the complete programme of the event, from which it can be seen that the ‘Hallelujah’ Chorus was in its customary position as the concluding item.

Once again Bouws (1966: 120) simply mentions the fact of its performance, and since it is a choral piece a reasonable assumption might be that it was sung. The *SSAJ* report does not specifically discuss it. A conclusion might be drawn from the names of the performers, if they were supplied, but they are not. In this regard, the writer of the report (having clearly enjoyed the concert) expresses a ‘wish that Custom permitted us to name the performers’. The ‘Custom’, which has restricted available information about many of these early performances, was to refrain from naming performers when they were amateurs, that is, people not making their living from musical activities. The programme as given in the report does provide one clue, but it is precisely this which introduces an element of doubt about the nature of the performance, of the same kind as in the case of the 1830 performance.

As is common in programmes of this period, details about the items performed are listed in three columns. On the right-hand side is the composer's name, in the middle column the title of the piece (given as 'Halleluja - Messiah' here), and on the left a description which places the piece into a certain 'category'. In the case of 'Hallelujah', this description is 'Chorus, Instrumental', and hence the doubt: does this refer to the performers (a choir *accompanied by* instruments) or to the genre (a choral piece *arranged for* instruments)? The latter seems to me more likely, since the other items in the same column mostly refer to genre ('Overture', 'Trio', 'Song', 'Anthem'). The possible exception to this is 'Quartett', describing the 'Dead March' from *Saul*, but since the actual performers are given in the middle column (seraphine, harp and two clarionets [sic]), again it seems that the first column is describing the type of arrangement. In any case, the tag 'Instrumental' seems unnecessary simply to refer to an accompaniment, since several other items were accompanied without the fact being mentioned. My conclusion therefore is that it was performed in an instrumental version, perhaps by the instruments that performed the 'Dead March' together with those (such as the flute) that contributed other items to the programme.

Since the purpose of the concert was fund-raising, its targeted audience was probably not so much the members of the Catholic Church itself as those in the community who would have been attracted to a programme of this sort (specifically sacred, and recognised by the writer of the *SSAJ* report as 'of a higher order of merit'), and who could afford the price of the ticket: in other words, once again an elite audience. The church itself catered primarily for a poorer community than the other denominations (Worden, Van Heyningen, & Bickford-Smith, 1998: 123). This may in fact be why a fund-raising concert was necessary: the established churches (Dutch Reformed and Anglicans), both of whom had opened new buildings in recent years, could rely in greater measure both on their congregations – St George's was partly financed by selling shares to prospective members (Donaldson, 1994: 81) – but also on state subsidies (Giliomee, 2003: 207). 'Hallelujah' could therefore be seen once again as playing both a direct role in the event (as part of a programme designed to draw and impress an audience) and then appropriately celebrating its success (the crowded Chapel and, accordingly, the sum raised). In the minds of some who were present, the performance may therefore have established or reinforced an association between *Messiah* and fund-raising, particularly for charitable causes. This association provided a stimulus not only for the majority of early performances of excerpts, but also for the first complete performance of the work in South Africa: specific aspects of the association will be discussed more fully in relation to that performance (see below: 61).

It is possible that another purpose of the 1846 event was to promote a more positive attitude towards the Catholic Church in a situation marked by a degree of anti-Catholic feeling. From the start the DRC had 'set itself against the strict hierarchy of the Catholic Church' (Giliomee, 2003: 5) and according to Margaret Donaldson 'DRC hostility towards Roman Catholics persisted throughout the nineteenth century' (1994: 76). While it seems to have become somewhat less marked later in the century, not long after this performance the British Governor, Sir Harry Smith, 'refused to allow the submission of a memorial from the Catholic bishop claiming the same rights (and stipends) for Catholic priests as were granted to dissenting ministers' (Ross, 1999b: 106). Whether or not it was a specific aim, the result seems to have been positive: the report praises 'the Rt. Reverend Prelate and Founder of the New Church (Dr.

Griffith), and relatives' for arranging the 'accommodation' in the Chapel and 'exercising their usual courtesy, for the benefit of the auditory' (*SSAJ*, 1846). In such a climate, and in such a building, 'Hallelujah' might have been constructed by the organisers, and perhaps by the listeners, primarily as a 'Christian' work, a symbolic affirmation of unity amongst all denominations in the Colony. It has been suggested that oratorio performances functioned in such a way for Victorian England: 'Even more than the hymns, oratorio transcended the tribal warfare between Protestant and Catholic, Anglican and Nonconformist which marked the Victorian religious scene' (Jim Obelkevich, quoted in Smither, 2000: 262).

What has been said above must remain speculation, though it is to some extent supported by the suspicion voiced in connection with a later performance that the Catholic Bishop was hoping to 'lure' people into the orbit of Rome (see below: 68). However, the writer of the *SSAJ* report does now make explicit another set of associations which I tentatively suggested for the 1830 event: the performance of musical works as a sign of cultural advancement, this in turn being linked to other forms of progress. On the same evening as the performance at the Chapel, a new lighting system was demonstrated at the gasworks. The writer exploited this conjunction in the title of the report, 'Light and Harmony', which on one level simply refers to the two events (demonstration and concert), but on another creates a more complex image in which both terms characterise the state of the community. This is elaborated in the text:

For the last three or four years there seems to have been a determination to arouse Cape Town, out of a deep and heavy sleep Mails, omnibuses, hard roads, bridges, theatres, concerts, lectures and oratorios, are but the outbirths and ultimates of that inward activity of mind, pressing forward to greater comfort and perfection The light was not entirely confined to the Gas Works on Monday evening.

(*SSAJ*, 1846)

The 'Hallelujah' Chorus, as the grand finale, could thus be understood, as previously suggested, as both an active contributor to the march of progress (by the simple fact of being performed), and also (through its celebratory character) providing a fitting expression of the more general sense that Cape Town as a community was 'pressing forward to greater comfort and perfection'.

The dynamic of that progress also involved a strengthening of the connections between the colony and the British Isles, as the following passage from the same report makes clear:

As the mighty works of Handel and Haydn were performing, and the 'Loud Timbrel Sounding', with the Harp, Seraphine and Flute, it was difficult to imagine we were in Africa, or in the locality of Plein-street, but in Tara's Halls, or some Gothic Pile, or Cathedral, of which the new building when completed will not prove an unworthy representation.

Oppositions between Europe and Africa, between home country and colony, and perhaps between two different levels of civilisation, are certainly invoked here, but they are also in the process of being erased as the characteristics of the former member of each pair are transplanted onto the latter. The writer was in Africa, but the features that had hitherto distinguished Africa from Europe had faded from view. Listening to Handel's music evoked the (human) landscape of England. The new 'Gothic Pile', which in a more literal sense brought that landscape to the slopes of

Table Mountain, was in fact to be the venue for the first complete performance of *Messiah* in South Africa some years later (see below: 62). In the meantime, an English landscape was also emerging in another part of the Colony, the Eastern Cape, and there too *Messiah* would make an early appearance (see below: 44).

For the Infant School, 1850

On 5 October 1850, the *SA Commercial Advertiser* carried an advertisement for a 'Concert of Sacred Music' to be given on the 14th in the Commercial Hall, 'for the Benefit of the Infant School'. It states that the programme was to be 'sustained by pupils from Mr Gladstones's various "Classes for the Practice of Concerted Music"'. According to Bouws (1966: 50, 109), the first mention of Frederick Gladstones in the Cape Town press is as a pianist in a concert that took place in March 1843. Shortly thereafter he announced his intention to form a choral society, the members of which would undergo 'a proper course of training' (quoted in Bouws, 1966: 110). Bouws's account describes Gladstones and his choir becoming mired in controversy, particularly through his refusal to cooperate with an instrumental group, the Amateur Musical Society, which was set up at almost the same time as his choral society and seems to have had the support of leading figures in the community. While there appears to be no record of a performance by Gladstones's choral society, he clearly did not give up his intention to train singers, and it may be that members of his classes contributed to the 1846 concert in the Roman Catholic Chapel, as well as to this one.

I was not able to find a review of this concert, but the advertisement (*SACA*, 1850) lists all the items on the planned programme. While it cannot be taken for granted that all actually were performed, a wide variety of solo and chorus items is shown. The names of only two composers appear more than once on the programme: Haydn (with three excerpts from *The Creation*) and Handel, represented by four items, two of which were from *Messiah* ('O thou that tellest' and 'For unto us a child is born'). The latter served as the finale, being followed only by 'God Save the Queen'. This is therefore the first record in Cape Town of a performance of items from *Messiah* other than 'Hallelujah' (though not the first in South Africa – see below: 45).

The British middle-class elite in Cape Town, as elsewhere, saw themselves as playing an important role as leaders in the social and cultural advancement of their community (Worden, Van Heyningen, & Bickford-Smith, 1998: 132). Support for this concert gave expression in a unified way to several of their characteristic concerns. The presentation of the concert was, once again, in itself a sign of cultural advancement, both for Cape Town and, more specifically, for its British section, increasingly concerned to establish and display its hegemony. Worden et al. mention art, literature and science as means of doing this (*ibid*: 156), but to the extent that musical developments were taking place they would surely have been seen in the same light. The concert demonstrated that Gladstones was growing the musical talents of the citizens so that they were able to tackle not just simple part songs and anthems but, probably for the first time in Cape Town, some of the more difficult choruses from *Messiah*. Furthermore, these were items of sacred music, in a community for which religion was a significant component of identity (*ibid*: 184). Finally, the cause that was to benefit from the concert, the Infant School, represented their sense of education as a crucial element contributing not just to social advancement but also to British ascendancy in the town (*ibid*: 153).

For the Patriotic Fund, 1855

Bosman (1928: 521) says that in 1835 we hear of oratorios in Cape Town. If this could be taken at face value, it would suggest a very significant early development overlooked by Bouws, and it would be highly likely that *Messiah* was one of the oratorios. However, there are two problems. Firstly, the year seems to be a misprint: it should be 1855, since Bosman's mention of it comes at the end of a chronological account of English contributions to musical activities in Cape Town, in which the previous event is dated 1854. Bosman gives a reference to the *SA Commercial Advertiser* for 3 May, and it is indeed in the 1855 issue of that date that an advertisement for 'An Oratorio' appears (*SACA*, 1855b). The date for the performance is given as 12 May, but it appears to have been postponed till the following week: on 19 May a further notice under the heading 'The Oratorio' states that it will take place 'this day at 2' (*SACA*, 1855b). This brings us to the second problem. The term 'oratorio' is not being used here in the way it would be today, as Bosman seems to have assumed, but rather as a synonym for 'sacred concert'. This usage can be traced back to eighteenth-century England: Howard Smither (2000: 385) points out that on at least one occasion Handel advertised a miscellaneous concert of anthems, oratorio excerpts, and Italian arias as "Mr Handel's Oratorio". The more detailed description of the Cape Town event that appears under the heading 'An Oratorio' makes it clear that it was not after all a particular work belonging to the genre of oratorio that was performed: 'The Performance will consist of selections from the Oratorios of "The Messiah", "The Creation", and other Sacred Compositions' (*SACA*, 1855b).

In fact, though several solo and choral items from *The Creation* were sung (including its most familiar chorus, 'The Heavens are Telling'), it seems from the reports on the concert (of which there were two, in the same issue of the *SA Commercial Advertiser*, 1855d and 1855e), that only one item from *Messiah* was performed. Once again it is the 'Hallelujah' Chorus; again it appears as the finale; and again it is not entirely clear whether it was played or sung. The first report states that it was 'performed by the whole orchestre [sic]' (*SACA*, 1855d). Though this suggests instrumental performance, it is possible that this use of the French term indicates all the performers together (rather like the broad sense of 'band' mentioned previously – see above: 27), since other non-vocal items (such as Handel's Occasional Overture) are described as being 'performed by the organ and instrumentalists'. This usage of the term 'orchestra' would not be unique: it may be compared with the following from a review of a performance in Durban, where the performance undoubtedly was choral: 'The beautiful chorus "For unto us a child is born" having been sung with telling effect by the orchestra ...' (*NM*, 1869b).

No information is given about the identity of the performers, except that 'Hallelujah' was 'conducted by Mr Medhurst' (*SACA*, 1855d). Robert Medhurst was a bandmaster who conducted the bands of several military regiments from the time of his arrival at the Cape in the late 1820s (Bouws, 1966: 93), as well as the Amateur Musical Society that provoked the ill-will of Gladstones (see above: 45). Like the 1846 event, this performance appears to have drawn on a range of available amateurs. While it was still being planned, a correspondent to the *SA Commercial Advertiser* referred to 'an oratorio or reunion of the musical talent of Cape Town and vicinity' (*SACA*, 1855a). It is noteworthy that as in the case of the 1830 performance of 'Hallelujah', oratorio could serve as a catalyst for mobilizing the musical forces of the community. Having

thereby provided a musical experience beyond what was ordinarily possible, oratorio would continue to carry the association of an important and memorable event.

The concert appears to have been a great success. The first report refers to the 'large and fashionable audience' that attended, and judges that 'the pieces altogether were admirably selected' (*SACA*, 1855d). The second report says that they were 'executed by the best artists and most accomplished amateurs of the city', and expresses the opinion that 'the performance, as a whole, was the best specimen of Sacred Music which has yet been heard in the colony' (*SACA*, 1855e). Once again we see the coincidence of the 'best' music, the 'best' performers, and the 'best' people in the audience, brought together in the 'best' concert of its kind (which is, as we have already seen, also the 'best' kind there is). The programme was popular enough to be repeated on 27 June. According to the report, the music and the performers were mostly the same. Amongst the handful of changes was the addition of an aria from *Messiah*, 'I know that my Redeemer liveth', sung on this occasion not by a soprano but by a 'gentleman' whose 'fine voice ... was greatly praised' (*SACA*, 1855g).

The money raised on this occasion was to go to the families of British soldiers who had been involved in the Crimean War (1854-1856). A Patriotic Fund was set up which received contributions from all over the Empire, including many parts of South Africa. When the South African fund was closed at the end of the year, the Governor 'suggested that an address to the Queen should be drawn up, stating that this subscription had been made as a proof of the loyalty and devotion of the colonists to Her Majesty' (*SACA*, 1855c). In addition to its charitable purpose, the event thus provided an opportunity for the colonists to affirm their identity as British subjects, expressed in terms of loyalty to the monarch. The aforementioned newspaper correspondent referred to 'the blessed cause we all, as Victoria's subjects, have so much at heart' (*SACA*, 1855a). It was thus also an occasion on which social hierarchy could be reaffirmed. The monarch occupied the apex of this hierarchy, but the importance of its lower levels is made clear when the same correspondent asks whether the presentation of the 'oratorio' should not be deferred

until the return of his Excellency the Governor from the Frontier, and the assembling of the members of both Chambers for the forthcoming session of Parliament? Thus an increased tone, probably, may be given to the auspicious gathering; and any among the Aristocracy who would otherwise "hang pie" might then be induced to throw in also their welcome patronage.

(*SACA*, 1855a)

Messiah thus appears here as an example of sacred music, on an occasion where sacred music not only affirms the Christian faith, but also supports a charitable cause, British patriotic sentiment, and a hierarchical social order. This cluster of associations held together throughout the second half of nineteenth century, and beyond, but the articulation between *Messiah* and a British patriotism focused on the monarch was to become particularly strong (see below, especially Chapter 9).

The performances took place in the now-completed Roman Catholic Cathedral, for which the 1846 concert had raised funds. Since on this occasion the funds were for a more general purpose, it becomes more likely that one of the benefits for the church in hosting the event was to create a positive image through its association with a charitable cause and cultural activity approved and attended by the elite of the town. Whether this was a specific motivation or not, it again appears to have been the result,

to judge from the newspaper reports: 'I cannot help remarking that the thanks of the inhabitants are due to the Right Rev. Bishop, for allowing the Cathedral for the occasion, and in doing so, I am sure that I express the opinion of the public in general' (SACA, 1855e). The concert thus continues the association of the Catholic church with fundraising presentations of sacred music which was begun in 1846, and in this respect is an important precursor of the first complete performance of *Messiah* in 1863.

Grahamstown: tasteful transformations

The second significant area for settlement by the British was the Eastern Cape. Leonard Thompson assesses the new situation brought about by the arrival of the 1820 Settlers as follows:

With their different language, traditions, religious affiliations, and experiences, they were culturally distinct from the earlier [Dutch] settlers. They were the first white immigrants who did not assimilate with them. Deep into the twentieth century, except among the elite of the southwestern part of the colony, social mixing was rare and intermarriages were few.

(L. Thompson, 2000 [1990]: 56)

The greater Englishness of the Eastern Cape (or at least its urban centres) may explain why the earliest evidence of a concert performance of items from *Messiah* comes not from Cape Town, but from the much more recently established centre of Grahamstown, in 1845 (predating the concert performance of 'Hallelujah' in the Cape Town Roman Catholic Chapel by one year). By this time Grahamstown had emerged as the most important trading and administrative centre in the Eastern Cape, second in size only to Cape Town (Saunders & Southey, 2001 [1998]:80). Although failure had attended the 'experiment in the transplanting to Africa of English rural society' (Keegan, 1996: 65) which had been the initial plan for the immigrants of 1820, the urban development which followed had considerable success. The Wesleyan missionary William Shrewsbury described Grahamstown in his journal while passing through the town in 1826, in a style similar to *Sam Sly's* reviewer imagining English cathedrals while listening to Handel in Cape Town:

The houses, the farm-yards, the cross-barred gates, the inhabitants in manners, dress and appearance are thoroughly English, and while looking at every object I met ... it almost seemed a reverie to conclude that I was in Africa. It certainly is pleasing to think that from my circuit in the heart of Caffraria I can at any time ride on horseback in the short space of 5 days to Graham's Town and behold England in miniature.

(quoted in Ross, 1999b:79)

'England in miniature' would surely not have been complete without *Messiah*.

The home of the Anglican congregation in Grahamstown was St George's church (the forerunner of the present cathedral), which had been opened in 1830. Jenifer Dugmore, in her research on the music of the cathedral, states:

At a Vestry meeting on 26 May 1845, it was suggested that oratorios be performed for church benefit funds. The motion was adopted, and the performance of the first oratorio took place on the 2nd of October in the same

year. There is unfortunately no record of what Oratorio was performed, or of the composer concerned.

(Dugmore, 1966: 42)

This last statement is true only in relation to the cathedral records, which seem to have been the main source that Dugmore consulted, because details of the programme were in fact given in the advertisement that appeared in the *Graham's Town Journal* of 25 September. Like Bosman (see above: 42), Dugmore seems to have assumed the familiar contemporary meaning of 'oratorio', whereas announcements of the Grahamstown event, such as the following, again show that the earlier meaning is intended: 'The Public are respectfully informed, that the first of a Series of Oratorios, or Sacred Concerts, in aid of the funds of St George's Church, will be performed on Wednesday Evening, 1st October' (*Cape Frontier Times*, 1845). In fact the performance was postponed till the following evening, due to bad weather.

Included in the list of seventeen items given in the *Graham's Town Journal* (1845a) are three from *Messiah*: the tenor recitative and aria 'Comfort ye – Every valley', the chorus 'And the glory of the Lord', and the alto aria and chorus 'O thou that tellest'. This is therefore the first recorded performance in South Africa of anything from *Messiah* other than 'Hallelujah'. They were the most substantial choral items on the programme: the only other pieces which involved the chorus were a Purcell anthem, 'My song shall be always', and 'Miriam's Song' by Moore. The status of Handel as composer of sacred music (for this community) is suggested by the fact that he is the only composer whose name appears more than once: apart from the three *Messiah* items, there were three further items from other Handel oratorios.

The performers are not named in the advertisements, but the reviewer in the *Graham's Town Journal* (GTJ, 1845b) describes them as 'Amateurs, both vocal and instrumental'. It is not possible to say with certainty how the *Messiah* items were performed since they are not specifically discussed. The reviewer mentions in general terms the desire to do their best which was manifested by the 'Orchestra', and the hard work of preparation done by the 'Amateur Band' on the choruses. K.J. Bromberger, in her research on the music of Grahamstown in this period, suggests that the 'Amateur Band' consisted of the performing – as opposed to the listening – members of the Graham's Town Amateur Musical Society (1967: 15). It is therefore quite possible that the choruses were given some kind of orchestral accompaniment, although it is also possible that the orchestra simply contributed the two Overtures listed in the programme. If the latter was the case, then the choruses were probably accompanied on the 'organ seraphine', mentioned as being used to play a solo at the start of the second part of the programme.

The social status of the event is made clear by the report that appeared in *The Cape Frontier Times*. It describes 'an audience of between six and seven hundred persons, including the Lieut.-Governor and his lady, Mr. and Mrs. West, and the principal inhabitants of the town and neighbourhood' (CFT, 1845). To this social distinction is added a cultural one (although its origins are located in 'nature' rather than 'culture'): the report states that the event was 'a treat to those whom nature has blessed in some degree with a musical ear and taste'. 'Good taste' is also attributed in the *Graham's Town Journal* review to those who selected the programme. It could be said, then, that emphasis on music by Handel in a sacred programme, and particularly on *Messiah*, is regarded as evidence of 'good taste' at this place and time. The newspaper writers

reflect the conceptions of taste held by their community and simultaneously contribute towards defining and establishing those conceptions within that same community.

This is the first time in this narrative that 'taste' has been mentioned by a newspaper writer. In defining tastes, Pierre Bourdieu (1993: 108) emphasises the role of *choices* which are made amongst 'practices' (such as, in this case, presenting and attending a concert) and 'properties' (such as excerpts from *Messiah*): the linkage between taste and principles of selection is explicit in the *GTJ* reference. Bourdieu continues:

In order for there to be tastes, there have to be goods that are classified, as being in 'good' or 'bad' taste, 'distinguished' or 'vulgar' ... and people endowed with principles of classification, tastes, that enable them to identify, among those goods, those that suit them.

In this regard, it is significant that the social context of these performances is that of an emerging elite, a group in the process of establishing its public identity, and doing so in part through the 'taste' it displays or approves.

Dick Hebdige, discussing the historical development of the word 'taste', points to the struggle over its meaning which took place in Europe through the latter part of the eighteenth century, being claimed on the one hand by the creative genius (Wordsworth's 'poet') and on the other by the 'emergent bourgeoisie', those who sought to 'consolidate their economic ascendancy in the cultural field', even to 'conceal and euphemize the "vulgar" sources of their wealth in industry and commerce and to raise themselves and their offspring to a "higher", more spiritual level' (Hebdige, 1996 [1987]: 68). It was the latter group that sought 'to codify and generalize the rules of taste and manners', in a way that was resisted by those (in the ranks of the artists and the aristocracy) with an interest in maintaining a conception of taste as something 'instinctive'. This did not, of course, prevent the emergent groups from adopting similar claims for taste as an 'instinctive' (or, in the case of the *CFT*, 'natural') attribute: indeed, it encouraged them to do so.

It is this same group that Winton Dean regards as having ensured the success in England not only of *Messiah* but of oratorio itself, although he refers to them as the 'rising middle class': 'the world of commerce and the professions and all those ... on whom the country's increasing prosperity conferred for the first time a certain independence' (Dean, 1959: 136). He adds: 'To this audience Handel addressed all the later oratorios.' Although a century had passed and the specific social boundaries were different, the dominant group which began to take shape in the Eastern Cape can nevertheless be described in very similar terms to those used by Hebdige and Dean. One historian who does so is Timothy Keegan: 'Men of generally lower-middling and working-class social origin ... with the ambition and energy to transform themselves into a colonial bourgeoisie, saw in mercantile enterprise their road to fortune' (1996: 67). Firmly established in Grahamstown by the 1830s, this group (which Keegan explicitly refers to as an 'emergent settler elite') could focus its attention not just on creating wealth, but also on legitimating its possession, at the same time creating a distinctive identity for themselves.

One of the ways in which it could do this was to demonstrate its 'good taste'. If musical taste is conferred by 'nature', as the *Cape Frontier Times* suggests, it demonstrates a 'natural' superiority in its possessor: a superiority which is part of the natural order of things. Bourdieu, by contrast, insists that taste is always a social

phenomenon, most notably throughout his book *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Bourdieu, 1984 [1979]). He analyses the ways in which judgements of taste come to be used as markers of social belonging: as he puts it, 'Taste is what brings together things and people that go together' (ibid: 241). By showing a taste for Handel, Grahamstown's emergent bourgeoisie were associating themselves with the music that, as we have seen, occupied the highest status in England, and thereby constituting themselves as an elite: 'the quality of the person ... is affirmed in the capacity to appropriate an object of quality' (ibid: 281). If tastes are a way of marking those who belong, they are also necessarily a way of marking those who do not: indeed Bourdieu refers to taste as 'almost always being a distaste for other people's tastes' (1993: 144). The inseparability of social and aesthetic judgements of value is clear in the following statement:

The manner of using symbolic goods, especially those regarded as the attributes of excellence, constitutes one of the key markers of "class" and also the ideal weapon in strategies of distinction, that is, as Proust put it, "the infinitely varied art of marking distances".

(Bourdieu, 1984 [1979]: 66)

In Grahamstown in 1845, it was membership of the British middle class which the settlers were particularly concerned to establish, both individually and as a colonial community. Alan Lester, in his study of the formation of settler identities in nineteenth-century South Africa and Britain, discusses their concern to recreate metropolitan patterns of taste: 'Settlers by the 1840s were able to indulge in the uplifting sense of national origin and powerful connection which British-style commodities and interior surroundings could furnish' (2001: 74). There can be little doubt that the sacred concert functioned in a similar way.

The *GTJ* review explicitly constructs this event as a 'first': the first concert of sacred music (and only the second concert of any kind) to have been presented in Grahamstown; hence (implicitly) a marker of colonial progress. Progress, equated with the advance of (British) civilization, was a prominent motif in settler discourse, and the fact that a concert of sacred music could be presented by the community of Grahamstown, including items from *Messiah*, was in itself evidence of this advance. It was, however, to a different kind of progress – the 'improvement' of the frontier landscape – that the settlers most often pointed for purposes of self-legitimation (Lester, 2001: 68), and in this regard the texts of the *Messiah* items performed in the concert take on a particular significance.

Lester describes the 'series of landscape imageries' developed in Robert Godlonton's *A Narrative of the Irruption of the Kafir Hordes*. Published in 1836 (ten years after Shrewsbury's description of Grahamstown as 'England in miniature'), this was an extremely influential work, 'the first widely available outline of a collective settler history'. In it, 'wilderness, ruggedness and impenetrability [are] associated consistently with the pre-colonial Khoesan and Xhosa' (ibid). The first aria in *Messiah* (sung by the tenor at the sacred concert) tells how 'Every valley shall be exalted ... the crooked [made] straight, and the rough places plain.' Those in the audience who paid attention to the text can hardly have failed to make the connection between the prophecy of Isaiah and their enterprise on the frontier, especially given the wide dissemination of Godlonton's views, both in his book and in the *Graham's Town Journal* which he edited. Lester notes how Godlonton's construction of settler

history 'allowed an array of settler experiences to be orchestrated around certain themes and it was the repetition of these themes which gave them their aura of "naturalness"' (ibid: 69). It would thus have been 'natural' for the audience to hear the Isaiah text in terms of the theme of bringing civilization to their landscape. One of the settlers, John Mitford Bowker, held that they were raising 'for the interest of the Empire, a garden in the wilderness' (quoted in Lester, 2001: 68). The recitative that precedes the aria just quoted would surely have been heard within this framework of ideas: 'The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.' The identification of the interests of God with the interests of the Empire is a topic that will be treated more fully below (see Chapter 9), but in the present context it is worth mentioning Godlonton's assertion (made to a public meeting in 1847) that 'the British race was selected by God himself to colonize Kaffraria' (quoted in Ross, 1999b: 63).

The fact that this was a concert performance thus in no way lessened the significance of *Messiah's* identity as a Christian work. In Grahamstown in 1845, the church building, the description of the concert ('oratorio, or *sacred* concert'), and the actual words of the items sung, would all have privileged its construction as an expression of Christian faith. Nevertheless, these could all have been ignored if the community of listeners itself had not had a strongly Christian identity. The organisers of the event were the Anglicans, but for an event of this nature they would have had to appeal also to the majority of the settler population who were Methodists. According to Keegan, Methodism was 'a crucial element in the corporate identity of the bulk of the settlers' (1996: 65), and he explains the appeal to the emergent elite of such aspects of its ethic as individual redemption and self-improvement, and 'a moral economy of acquisitiveness through diligence, hard work and sacrifice' (ibid: 67). Dean suggests that in England it was the support of the Methodists for *Messiah* that was 'in great part responsible for this oratorio attaining and holding its treasured national position' (1959: 140), and this would clearly have been significant in Grahamstown, which Keegan describes as 'largely a Methodist town' (ibid). A large part of the public for this performance, and probably the performers as well, would thus have come from a social context in which *Messiah* was both familiar and respected.

Of particular significance in relation to this performance is Weber's highlighting of the role that Handel's oratorios played in bridging religious divisions in England, becoming a kind of ritual which Anglicans and nonconformists could share in the absence of a common liturgy: 'By the end of the eighteenth century, Anglicans and Dissenters were able to sit down together in public halls – in some instances even in churches and cathedrals – to hear Handel's oratorios, odes and masques' (1992: 14). As far as the Eastern Cape is concerned, Lester has explored the crucial importance for the British settlers of constructing 'an embracing sense of identity' (Lester, 2001: 46). As in England, the religious division between Anglicans and nonconformists in the Eastern Cape had been significant, especially in the early days of the settlement, when the religious differences overlapped to some extent with what Lester regards as the primary social divisions, those of class. The settlers he refers to as the 'gentry' tended to be Anglicans, while the members of the joint stock parties were mainly nonconformists (ibid: 50). However, such religious and class divisions, 'in their marginal colonial environment, were potentially dangerous', and although they could not be completely erased, it became increasingly important to promote solidarity and a more inclusive overarching identity (ibid: 54). The concert of sacred music could

certainly have acted as an occasion on which that collective identity was forged, displayed and celebrated.

Lester (ibid: 63) notes that this inclusive settler identity extended 'far deeper than the public discourse of settler "progress" that had thus far been established' and suggests that it was defined in opposition to two perceived threats, which were felt to be especially acute in the wake of the Sixth Frontier War of 1834-5. The war starkly highlighted the first, and more immediate, threat – that posed by the Xhosa. 'Comfort ye, my people, saith your God,' sings the tenor, in a phrase that has spoken to countless numbers of those seeking hope while facing trials and hardships. Although these words are addressed, in the original context, to the people of Israel, the fact that they are not specifically named in this text makes it that much easier for any given group of listeners who identify themselves as 'God's people' to apply the words to their own situation, and to hear subsequent references to 'Zion', 'Judah', or 'Jerusalem' as referring to them: 'Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem,' the tenor continues, 'and cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished.' The 'warfare' would inevitably be understood in terms of whatever conflict was closest to hand, and in the case of the British settlers this would clearly have been the devastation they experienced in the recent war with the Xhosa, and the frightening possibility of further attacks, so clearly expressed by John Mitford Bowker: 'I know that he [the Xhosa] has once overrun and destroyed these districts, and I fear him, knowing him to be ready and willing to do it again' (quoted in Lester, 2001: 64).

The second threat perceived by the settlers was less direct, though related, and emerged in the debates that followed the war. There was a significant body of humanitarian opinion, both at the Cape and in Britain, sympathetic to the Xhosa. Humanitarian criticism of the settlers raised the prospect of imperial abandonment (ibid: 77) at a time when strong links with the metropole were vital both for protection and for commercial enterprises. Lester suggests that it was 'the ambivalence in their relationship with the metropolitan bourgeoisie, generated by these tensions, that lay at the heart of a settler identity that was becoming simultaneously assertive, defensive and loudly loyal' (ibid: 65).

Against both these threats, then, a united front was necessary. Because of its prominence in England as a musical work recognised across a wide social spectrum, *Messiah* provided as good an opportunity as any for drawing people together in a shared experience of a shared heritage, through which other divisions could be transcended. It was particularly in response to the second threat that a shared 'Britishness' became a significant element of settler identity. According to Lester, this 'was vital to the settlers' claim to metropolitan protection and support' (ibid: 74). The first time when that identity was celebrated on a large scale had in fact been in the year before the performance under discussion. A festival was held in Grahamstown, apparently to celebrate the silver jubilee of the settlers' departure from Britain, although the specific date chosen (10 April) was that of their arrival (Ross, 1999b: 63). Texts quoted at these celebrations, or written specifically for them, can provide clues to the meanings that would likely have been attached to the very similar texts of the *Messiah* items sung in the sacred concert.

William Shaw's address to the congregation in St George's church took the following quotation from 1 Samuel as its text: 'Only fear the Lord and serve him in truth with all

your hearts; for consider how great things he hath done for you.' Shaw's use of this particular text at this particular moment suggests that his intention is to represent the settlers as people who have been favoured by God. Later in the day an adapted version of the British national anthem was sung, which included the following exhortation to God: 'And lift on Albany,/Our rising colony,/Thy smiling face' (quoted by Ross, 1999b: 64, n.93). Given the salience in the settler community of the ideas embodied in these texts, it seems unlikely that such ideas would not have informed the response of an audience listening to the following lines from 'O Thou that tellest': 'Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.'

A year later, on 10 April 1845 (only a few months before the performance), the choir of the Wesleyan church in Grahamstown sang an anthem with words composed by the Rev. Thornley Smith, which included the following:

Praise ye Jehovah! and sing to his name,
O'er Afric's rude mountains his goodness proclaim!
Fly on the winds to tell all the glad story,
The light of salvation now shines on this land.

(ibid: 66)

Again the similarities are striking:

O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion, get thee up into the high mountain: O thou that tellest good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God! O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion, arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.

This is not to suggest that everyone in the audience would have heard these words in the same way. It is to suggest that the ideas of proclaiming God's goodness and favour across the mountains, telling a glad story about light shining on a rising colony, were significant motifs in the discourse of a settler identity that became especially prominent at the time of this performance, and that it is therefore reasonable to expect that the *Messiah* texts would have been understood by at least some (and possibly the majority) in the audience, in terms of the dominant meanings that had been established in the settler community. The 'good tidings' had come not just to a biblical Zion remote in time and space, but to the here and now of the Eastern Cape.

Durban: joining the chorus

The third area of the present South Africa to be settled by the British was Natal. English traders from the Eastern Cape were active in the area from the mid-1820s, and a small settlement, growing up round the natural harbour, was known first as Port Natal, and from 1835 as Durban (Saunders & Southey, 2001 [1998]: 59). The total population remained small until the annexation of the whole of Natal by Britain in 1843 brought greater numbers of immigrants. By the time *Messiah* first appeared in Durban in 1854, the total white population of 1200 was still less than the estimated number of people who heard 'Hallelujah' in Cape Town in 1830.

Discussing the early British settlements in Natal, Charles Ballard mentions a variety of features which 'reflected the intent of the British settlers to create a society like that

which they had left in Britain' (1989: 129). The appearance of *Messiah* in Durban must surely have been a result of this intent, following even more swiftly than in Cape Town or Grahamstown the arrival of the first large groups of settlers, which took place between 1849 and 1852 (ibid: 126). In his research on music in Durban, George Jackson mentions several occasions on which excerpts from *Messiah* were performed in the early years of the settlement. The first of these took place in 1854 under the auspices of the Durban Mechanics' Institute (Jackson, 1970: 49). 'Hallelujah' is again the item that introduces *Messiah* to Natal, and on this occasion the newspaper report unambiguously states that it was played rather than sung.

Mechanics' Institutes became an important feature of nineteenth-century social life in Britain, and it is therefore not surprising that they were established in various South African towns as soon as there was a sufficiently large British population to support them. Originally intended to provide adult technical education, it was not long before they began to include recreational activities (Smither, 2000: 276) which appealed to a broader audience, and especially in small towns they often became the focal point for social and cultural activities. In due course, they became 'less specifically adult education establishments and much more places which provided a wide range of improving recreations ... By providing acceptable recreations and amusements, it was hoped that the Institutes would provide a suitable milieu where people of all classes could meet' (Golby & Purdue, 1984: 97).

The Mechanics' Institute in Durban hosted, amongst its activities, lectures on a wide variety of topics. On 23 June 1854, Mr R.S. Upton gave the second of two lectures on music. The advertisement stated that his topic would be 'Sacred Music' and that 'Mrs Cubitt and several other friends have promised to assist in the illustrations' (*Natal Mercury*, 1854c). According to a notice that appeared in the *Natal Mercury* (1854b), Mrs Cubitt was a local teacher of piano and singing. The report on the event given in the *Mercury* (1854d) describes her as 'our accomplished townswoman' and states that during the lecture she sang, as well as accompanying herself and others on the seraphine. It fell to her to provide a fitting conclusion to the evening in the form of the 'Hallelujah' Chorus, which according to the report she played 'in a very masterly style'. The report ends by suggesting the formation of a 'Glee and Madrigal Society ... as the want of an efficient chorus prevented several most beautiful illustrations from being attempted.' If the Cape Town performances of 1830 and 1846 were, like this one, instrumental rather than choral, it seems entirely possible that the reason there too was the absence of a choir capable of making a success of such a 'grand' and well-known chorus.

The report uses just one adjective to characterise 'Hallelujah': it describes it as 'that sublime composition'. While once again recognizing that this is a small detail, it does at least suggest a familiarity on the part of the writer with the discourse surrounding *Messiah* in England. Richard Luckett refers to 'sublime' as 'that dangerous word that was to dominate a century of criticism of *Messiah*', while Howard Smither makes the more general point that 'the identification of oratorio with church music and the sublime is a thread that runs through English criticism of oratorio' (2000: 290). He quotes an article published in the *Musical World* in 1862 that describes oratorio as 'the most sublime form of musical composition' (ibid: 254), and a reference to 'the sublime "Hallelujah Chorus"' written in 1859 by George Sala, describing a performance of *Messiah* in London's Exeter Hall (ibid: 265). The 'sublime' was the

highest of the three categories proposed by the English composer William Crotch in a series of lectures given in Oxford and London and eventually published in 1831 (the other two being the beautiful and the ornamental) (ibid: 289). He stated that 'the word sublime originally signifies high, lofty, elevated The grandest style in music is therefore the sacred style – that of the church and oratorio' (ibid: 290). This discourse therefore had the effect of constructing oratorio in relation to church music, and thereby reinforcing its links to religion. Smither quotes an earlier article in the *Musical World* (1838) which asserted that 'no emotions are so noble and sublime as those that are connected with the adoration of the Supreme Being. Tried by this test, Handel is the greatest of composers whose works are familiar to an English ear' (ibid: 264). The 'Hallelujah' Chorus is nothing if not 'adoration of the Supreme Being', and its description as 'sublime' invokes this cluster of associations on an occasion where the speaker had indeed taken as his subject 'Music in its relation to Religion' (*NM*, 1854d).

There is one further point to notice from this event, since it will recur repeatedly in later performances. The report states that 'immediately at the conclusion' of the 'Hallelujah' Chorus, 'the audience by a sort of common consent, joined with the choir in singing the national anthem, Mrs Cubitt taking solo parts'. The singing of 'God Save the Queen' at the end of a concert was, of course, customary at the time, but it is the effect of its constant juxtaposition with the 'Hallelujah' Chorus that I want to consider here. The frequency with which the two pieces were brought into direct contact was largely because, as we have seen, 'Hallelujah' was so widely regarded as an appropriate finale not only for concerts but for many other public occasions where the national anthem would also have been sung. As it happens, the key scheme works well: the final chord of 'Hallelujah' (D major) can be heard as a dominant preparation for the first chord of 'God Save the Queen' (G major). Following one with the other, as on this occasion, would have drawn attention to many other features which the two pieces have in common, and this in turn would have facilitated the reciprocal influence of their meanings.

Their origins in the same historical context give the two pieces some commonality in terms of their musical language, as well as the opportunity for gathering a similar set of patriotic associations. The old song 'God Save the King' was revived, in its setting by Thomas Arne, in the same decade as the composition of *Messiah* (the 1740s), which also saw the appearance of that other musical embodiment of British national feeling, 'Rule, Britannia'. Derek Scott significantly couples these patriotic songs with Handelian oratorio in the course of providing a historical context for his discussion of the Victorian drawing-room genre, seeing them as common expressions of British patriotism at a time when 'it was easy to identify with God's chosen people and their heaven-sent victories' (Scott, 1989: 2).

The text of the 'Hallelujah' Chorus praises God as a heavenly monarch. Apart from the word 'Hallelujah', all the other verbal phrases (set to the various motives which in turn characterise the various sections of the piece) contain some reference to God's reign or kingship: 'for the *Lord* God omnipotent *reigneth*'; 'The *kingdom* of this world is become the *kingdom* of our *Lord* and of his Christ'; 'and he shall *reign* for ever and ever'; '*King of kings* and *Lord of lords*'. This textual emphasis has several effects when linked to 'God Save the Queen'. The omnipotent being celebrated in the 'Hallelujah' Chorus becomes one with the God invoked as protector of the British

monarch, and therefore also of those who identify as her subjects. At the same time, the British monarch is also protector of the interests of this God on earth (as head of the Anglican church the monarch is officially 'Protector of the Faith'), and this role is strongly reinforced by connecting the national anthem to a powerful piece of music in praise of God. The intertextual relationship between the two pieces of music creates an identity between the interests of God and the interests of the monarch. Beyond that, the very concept of monarchy receives a powerful legitimation by the repeated description of God in these terms. If God is primarily a monarch, monarchy must be a particularly praiseworthy institution.

If the British monarch's personal power was on the wane by this time, she remained the symbolic representative of an empire which was steadily extending its rule over more and more of the globe. By singing 'God Save the Queen', those present at the concert proclaimed themselves part of this empire, granting it their loyalty and simultaneously being granted an identity and various material benefits as its subjects. It was in exactly these terms that the singing of the national anthem at the end of another concert in Durban a few months earlier was described. According to the report in the *Natal Mercury*, 'the whole assembly rose with one accord and joined in the national anthem with a heartiness that could leave no doubt of the loyalty of this portion of her Majesty's subjects' (1854a). By a process of association the singing of 'Hallelujah' could easily have come to carry much the same set of meanings, even without the notion of the peculiar 'Englishness' of Handel, and *Messiah* in particular, to which I will return when discussing some of the later performances of the complete work.

The report just quoted introduces one further link between the two pieces: the custom of standing. It is, however, more than just another sign that they have much in common. It is in itself a sign of acceptance by the participants in this ritual of the legitimacy of the respective 'reigns' to which they are subject. The opening bars of both pieces carry a demand which is both intimate (touching the participants at the most basic physical level) and public (in that the response is observable by all), a socially established convention which the individual must nevertheless choose to observe or not. By observing it, individuals become part of a collective, defined on the basis of adherence to the Christian faith and loyalty to the British monarch.

The story of the origins of the convention only deepens a sense of the inextricable intertwining of religion and monarchy. Retold in countless programmes and newspaper articles produced for performances of *Messiah*, the story has George II attending the first London performance of *Messiah*, and being so moved by the 'Hallelujah' chorus that he stood in recognition of 'a greater monarch'; and of course if the King stood, it was only proper for everyone else to stand too. Evidence for this is a letter written many years after the event by James Beattie, which attributes the story to Lord Kinoull (Lockett, 1992: 175). The details of the story may be questioned: Lockett considers available evidence and comes to the conclusion that George II probably did establish the precedent, though not necessarily at the first London performance. He cites a letter written in 1756 as the first mention of the custom of standing, which does not appear to have been adopted for the national anthem until the 1780s (ibid: 176). In any event, a century later the custom was well established for both: people stood in honour of the British monarch, and (in deference to a precedent that was itself believed to have been established by a British monarch)

they stood also in honour of the divine monarch praised through Handel's music. All this may help to explain Robert Manson Myers's assertion that 'to this day' (he was writing in the 1940s) 'the "Hallelujah Chorus" remains a kind of national anthem of the British race' (1948: 229).

Only one further reference has been found to *Messiah* in Natal (prior to the first complete performance in South Africa, which will be discussed in the next chapter). This occurred in connection with an 'Exhibition and Entertainment' arranged in aid of the Durban Ladies' Benevolent Society just before Christmas 1862. Events were planned to run over three days, though not much seems to have happened on the first day because of bad weather. There were 'daily and nightly exhibitions of oil paintings, chromo-lithographs, stereoscopic views' (*Natal Star*, 1862), lectures, and also musical performances which, according to the *Natal Mercury* (1862), were 'the chief attraction'. In the programme for the second evening (23 December), 'the pieces were mostly of a sacred character' (*NM*, 1862) and included two excerpts from *Messiah*: 'And the Glory of the Lord' and 'Lift up your heads'. The *Natal Mercury* report describes the performers as 'a band of amateurs', but the *Natal Star* identifies them as 'the Wesleyan choir'. Possibly the choir of the Wesleyan church was augmented by some extra singers for this important occasion. Methodists did form the largest denomination amongst the early British colonists in Natal (Ballard, 1989: 131), and this suggests that Methodism was here, as in the Eastern Cape, an important factor in the introduction of *Messiah*. The accompaniments were played on the harmonium by 'Mr Swift, another amateur – well known to Durban' (*NM*, 1862).

This event once again illustrates the intertwining, that seems to have been so characteristic of British society at this time, of music, religion, charity, social and cultural progress, and social status. The musical items were performed before and after a lecture by Rev. Thomas Guard, on the subject (presumably connected to the purpose of the whole event) of 'Christian Philanthropy'. While religious considerations were certainly one motivation for philanthropy (hence the appropriateness of specifically Christian music such as the *Messiah* excerpts on this occasion), those who became involved in such initiatives as the Durban Ladies' Benevolent Society were also frequently 'part of a self-conscious urban elite who saw themselves as playing a major role in the development of their cities' (Harvey, n.d.). Much the same could be said of those who formed the committees for the Mechanics' Institutes. The advancement of the community was shown in its commitment to education, to cultural activities, and the addressing of social problems, in all of which the elite were to set the pace. The *Natal Star* commented that 'the evening proved that the charms of music and eloquence combined could attract more than 250 of the townfolk of Durban of the higher class' (*NS*, 1862).

Port Elizabeth: not to be left behind

Algoa Bay had been the site of nothing more than a military fort prior to the arrival of the British settlers in 1820, when the new settlement of Port Elizabeth was founded (Keegan, 1996: 71; Saunders & Southey, 2001 [1998]: 136). During the 1840s Port Elizabeth, as the Eastern Cape's main port, began to emerge as a possible regional rival for Grahamstown (Keegan, 1996: 161). By the early 1850s, people in Port Elizabeth were beginning to assert the status of their town even in comparison with

Cape Town, as can be seen from the following comment that appeared in the *Port Elizabeth Telegraph* in 1854: 'In the production of plays as in most other things, it appears the frontier people are leaving the "City of the Mountain" behind them' (quoted in Troskie, 1969: 5). Given this concern with the progress of the community, and its predominantly English makeup, it could be expected that some trace of *Messiah* would be found by the end of the 1850s.

Previous archival research on the early period of Port Elizabeth's musical history is not as extensive as that available for Cape Town, Grahamstown, and Durban. The entry for Port Elizabeth in the *South African Music Encyclopedia* gives a brief and somewhat fragmentary summary of activities in the early period. Albert Troskie's much more detailed dissertation covers specifically the years 1875 – 1900, but does also give some information on the earlier period by way of introduction. Neither source makes any mention of *Messiah* in the early period. The first reference to *Messiah* in the *SAME* article is to a complete performance given in 1894 (Malan, 1986b: 94). Troskie (1969: 104) gives an earlier date, 1875, also for a complete performance. To confirm my suspicion that, given the similarity of circumstances, excerpts must have appeared in Port Elizabeth as they did in the other towns, it was therefore necessary to do my own newspaper search.

The *SAME* article does provide one clue, in the form of references to a Choral Society sponsored by the Athenaeum Club (Malan, 1986b: 92), although closer investigation suggests that the article has put together the scattered items found in the newspapers in a somewhat confusing manner. The Athenaeum was founded in 1856 'to "promote the interests of science and literature" among its members and the public' (Harradine, 1994: 43). Whatever musical activities may have been undertaken, it does not seem that choral music had initially been a significant feature. Apart from the absence of any reports in the newspapers, this is suggested by a letter that was published in the *Eastern Province Herald* at the end of 1858, from a correspondent signing himself 'Festina Lente':

In the *Telegraph* of Thursday 23rd Dec., we noticed a letter suggesting the formation of a Sacred Harmonic Society. The idea has been several times mooted among the young men here; but, from certain disagreements which have at times taken place, and from the difficulty of getting a regular attendance, was abandoned

(EPH, 1858)

It is only in 1860 that more regular references appear to the activities of a 'Musical and Choral Society' associated with the Athenaeum (for example, *EPH*, 1860a; 1860b). There were two groups, one vocal and one instrumental, which had weekly rehearsals. Their first concert was given on 28 June 1860. The advertisement for the performance gives the full programme (*EPH*, 1860c). There was a wide variety of music, including vocal and instrumental solos, but the first three items were choruses from large-scale choral works: 'The Heavens are Telling' from Haydn's *Creation*, a selection from Mozart's so-called 'Twelfth Mass', and, sure enough, 'Lift Up Your Heads' from *Messiah*, which the reviewer felt 'was decidedly the best chorus sung' (*EPH*, 1860d). The same group, under their conductor Mr T.H. Harraden, presented a further concert on 3 August. The first half consisted of a more varied selection from the same three works as in the previous concert. The items from *Messiah* were the opening recitative and aria, 'Comfort Ye' and 'Every Valley', and the following chorus, 'And the Glory of the Lord' (*EPH*, 1860e).

Although there are no further reports of concerts by this group, there are continued references through 1861 and 1862 to its meetings and practices. During 1861 leadership of the group was taken over by Mr G.W. Onions (*EPH*, 1861b). In the *Eastern Province Herald* of 4 June 1861, he placed an advertisement for a 'Lecture on the Science and art of Music', in which 'by diagrams and the assistance of Musical friends, he hopes to entertain those Ladies and Gentlemen who may favour him with their patronage, by the illustration of specimens of Musical compositions, taken from various authors' (*EPH*, 1861a). The more detailed 'programme' appended to the advertisement offers a rather curious mixture of historical, theoretical and analytical elements, but for present purposes its significance lies in the fact that only one composer (Handel) is mentioned by name, and only one composition (needless to say, *Messiah*): the third section of the lecture would 'illustrate some of the most striking traits in the *Messiah* of Handel and other great Authors'. This shows that the prestige of *Messiah* was maintained also through formal educational discourse about music, presented to amateurs who would constitute the audience and many of the performers for future presentations of the work, or excerpts from it.

However, over the next two years, more seems to have been planned and promised than was actually delivered with regard to *Messiah* and choral music more generally. In October 1861 the *Herald* reports on the activities of the Musical and Choral Society: 'It is proposed that a grand concert shall be given in the Town Hall, early in December, and we have no doubt that this will surpass all previous attempts of this kind' (*EPH*, 1861b). In July 1862, we hear that 'the members of the Musical and Choral Society assisted by all the vocal and instrumental talent to be obtained in Port Elizabeth, shall give a series of four monster concerts at the Town Hall, at intervals of three months ... the first concert of the series shall take place some time in September' (*EPH*, 1862a). In September 1862: 'Mr Paul Reece will be happy to receive the names of any young persons desirous of forming themselves into a Class for Singing, on the plan adopted by Joseph Mainzer, Hullah &c. The Class will be established with the view to a Public Performance of Sacred Music on Christmas Day' (*EPH*, 1862b). All these performances would have been likely candidates for the appearance of items from *Messiah*, and it seems probable that the plans and discussions surrounding them would have continued to remind people of its significance. I could, however, find no sign of any of these performances actually having taken place.

On 20 January 1863 an advertisement appears which combines elements of the last two plans mentioned above, though without specific mention of the Musical and Choral Society: 'Mr. Onions has the honour to announce that he will give A CONCERT of Vocal and Instrumental Music, in the Large Room of the Town Hall on Wednesday 21st January, when he will be assisted by Mr. and Mrs. Paul Reece, the Members of the Glee Society, and other talented Amateurs, who have kindly consented' (*EPH*, 1863a). The projected programme included both of the *Messiah* choruses already sung in Port Elizabeth ('And the Glory of the Lord' and 'Lift Up Your Heads') as well as the solos 'Comfort Ye' and 'Every Valley' (to be sung by Mr Onions) and 'But Thou Didst Not Leave' (to be sung by Mrs Reece). Judging from the reports published after the event, however, only Mr Onions's solos were actually performed. The reason for the abandonment of the choruses is suggested by the review published in the *Herald*:

We are given to understand that it [the concert] was held for the benefit of a new seraphine for the Baptist Chapel, but it seems odd that no mention of such an object was made in the advertisement. What with this slight mystery, and the fact that the arrangements for the whole matter were made in a most hurried manner, many amateurs who had been invited refused at a late hour to assist, and accordingly the first part of the programme was considerably altered, the choruses being entirely omitted.

(EPH, 1863b)

As in the other towns that have been considered, *Messiah* appeared in Port Elizabeth as the music of a new English middle-class elite whose concern was the improvement of their community in all respects, so that it could show itself equal if not superior to other colonial centres. The intertwining of cultural (including musical) advancement with charitable concerns and economic development, all within the overall framework of continual colonial progress, is typically expressed in the final paragraph of the aforementioned letter from 'Festina Lente'. Having outlined his proposals for the setting up of a Musical Association, he concludes:

Permit us in closing to express a hope that by the beginning of 1860 we may find our Library, improved Athenaeum, remodelled and invigorated, Musical Association in full play, Sailors' Home at its benevolent work, and Chamber of Commerce in active operation; and then, having advanced thus far in the right direction, the next year will afford time for other improvements.

(EPH, 1858)

Summary

Table 1 (see below: 58) lists the excerpts from *Messiah* that were performed prior to the first complete performance in 1863. They are given in chronological order of their first appearance.

From this it appears that there were definite 'favourites'. Considering that there are over fifty items in the published score of *Messiah*, the reappearance of the same choruses and arias in different centres becomes more striking. This cannot be attributed to their suitability for the relatively limited resources of a new colony, since it is by no means obvious that these are the 'easiest' sections from the work. It can safely be assumed that a partial explanation lies in the popularity already gained by these items in England, but it seems likely, too, that their appropriateness for the occasions on which they were performed did not go unnoticed.

What the items do have in common is a positive, affirmative, confident tone. They are all in major keys. The solos are more reflective, but all the choruses tend towards faster tempi and a lively rhythmic treatment. The texts look forward to the coming of the Messiah, or affirm his victory. Perhaps the keynote is 'glory', a word that appears in three of the five choruses: 'And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed' (No. 4), 'The glory of the Lord is risen upon thee' (No. 9), 'and the king of glory shall come in' (No. 33). The listeners were thus able to bask in a multiply-reflected 'glory': spoken about in the text, but heard also in the music; descending from God to the

Table 1

No. in score	Title	Number of performances	Towns	Years
44	Hallelujah	5 (probably four of these were instrumental)	Cape Town Durban	1830 1841 1846 1855 1854
2, 3	Comfort Ye – Every Valley	3	Grahamstown Port Elizabeth	1845 1860 1863
4	And the Glory of the Lord	3	Grahamstown Port Elizabeth Durban	1845 1860 1862
9	O Thou That Tellest	2	Grahamstown Cape Town	1845 1850
12	For Unto Us	1	Cape Town	1850
45	I Know That My Redeemer Liveth	1	Cape Town	1855
33	Lift Up Your Heads	2	Port Elizabeth Durban	1860 1862

British monarch and then on to the local representatives of her rule, and finally to the individual members of the community who constituted the audience on a given occasion, and whose identity, values and concerns (to the extent that these were understood to be shared) were thus powerfully affirmed. Through these words and this music, they were able to sustain their belief in the legitimacy of their identity, the validity of their purposes, and the certainty of their future progress, including their triumph over whatever adversities they might presently be encountering.

If this provides some indication of the particular qualities that were most valued in *Messiah*, at least by the members of these British colonial communities, it also raises the possibility that these valued qualities played a significant role in influencing understandings of the work as a whole. The meanings provided by the most familiar excerpts ('Hallelujah', above all) helped to constitute a 'dominant' reading for a work in which the various individual items in fact have quite diverse characters. For example, if 'Hallelujah' had become a kind of all-purpose celebratory piece, the complete work could be seen in a similar light, as indeed was the case in England: Burrows (1991: vii) describes *Messiah* as 'a celebratory work' in the context of the first Handel Commemoration of 1784. It is to the earliest complete performances in South Africa that we now turn.

CHAPTER 4: *The first complete performances*

When can a performance of *Messiah* be described as ‘complete’? It might seem obvious that a complete performance would have to include all items included in the published score, but in the performance history of *Messiah* it would in fact be a minority of performances (from anywhere in the world) that would meet this requirement. In most cases, certain items are cut. There are various reasons for this: it may be felt that the audience would react negatively to the extreme length of an unabridged version, or that there is insufficient rehearsal time to prepare all the items adequately, or that certain items are beyond the capabilities of the available performers, or simply that it has become customary to omit certain items. Sometimes, at the relevant season, performances of *Messiah* are given which consist primarily of selections from Part 1 (the so-called ‘Christmas’ portion), or from Part 2 (the ‘Passion’ or ‘Easter’ portion, depending on the emphasis). Whether a performance is to be described as complete therefore hinges on the extent of the cuts, and it must be admitted that in certain cases a performance might equally well be described as a (substantial) selection of items *from* the work, or as a performance *of* the work with (substantial) cuts. Here I have simply regarded a performance as complete if it is advertised and presented as ‘a performance of’ (rather than ‘excerpts from’) *Messiah*.

Cape Town, 1863: the talk of the town

As far as I have been able to determine, the first ‘complete’ performance of *Messiah* that took place in Cape Town in 1863 was also the first complete South African performance of any oratorio. It was regarded at the time as an event of major cultural significance. The reviewer in the *Cape Argus* proclaimed it ‘a triumph in art such as it had not previously been our lot to witness in South Africa – viz., the complete performance of the greatest work of the greatest master in music’ (CA, 1863b). The day after the performance the *South African Advertiser and Mail* carried not only a lengthy review but also an editorial. The review describes the performance in great detail, as well as giving an account of Handel’s life and works, in the course of which he is again described as ‘the greatest of composers, generally termed “the master of all masters”’ (SACA, 1863f). This emphasis on Handel’s stature reinforces the importance of the event, and the significance of the performers’ achievement. It was ‘a daring experiment’, says the writer, to present something ‘of such high order as the *Messiah*, which is “for all time”.’ In the next issue of the same newspaper, the writer of the ‘Town Talk’ column asserts that ‘the talk of the past week has been about the Oratorio’, and expresses the opinion that ‘a better thing of the kind was never heard or done in Cape Town’ (SACA, 1863j).

Not much ‘of the kind’ had been happening in Cape Town at all. It may be that the relatively small number of English speakers in Cape Town was unable to provide a basis for ongoing choral work on a large scale. There also seems to have been a degree of rivalry which prevented the bringing together of those musicians who were active in Cape Town, except on rare special occasions. This is confirmed by the following comment from the review of the 1855 concert in aid of the Patriotic Fund

(see above: 42): 'We have only to regret that months, and even years may elapse before we may again be so entertained, owing either to the trouble in getting up such a performance, or to the want of cooperation among the musical body' (*SACA*, 1855d).

A third possibility is suggested by Bosman's observation (1980: 284) that during the middle years of the nineteenth century there was a kind of inverse relationship between the amounts of musical and theatrical activity: as one came to the fore, the other declined. It is almost as though available resources could not support both. The years from 1856 to 1862 (comprising precisely those years between the Patriotic Fund concert and the complete performance) are viewed by Bosman as 'years of plenty' for the theatre, whereas there is little sign of musical activity, at least in the form of public concerts. An examination of the *SA Advertiser & Mail* in the two years preceding the *Messiah* performance bears this out: advertisements for concerts are few, those for theatre numerous. The reviewer of one of the rare concerts confirms that people had been heard 'lamenting that there are no concerts in Cape Town' (*SACA*, 1862a).

To mount something on as large a scale as a complete oratorio performance, some kind of special motivation was needed for drawing together the existing musical resources of Cape Town. A good idea of these resources can be gained from advertisements, notices and reports of various kinds in the newspapers at the time. There were the bands of British military regiments stationed at the Cape; there were small choral groups such as the German 'Liedertafel', various church choirs, and 'singing classes'; and there was a variety of individual musicians. Amongst the latter were a small number of 'professionals' (mostly teachers) and a much larger number of 'amateurs'. Advertisements for sheet music and instruments placed by the two music dealers (E.A. Lefebre and Darter & Sons) suggest that there was a good deal of domestic music-making in Cape Town.

Missing from these musical resources is a large choral society, the type of group most likely to be concerned with the production of oratorio. Van Niekerk (1989: 31) refers to the existence in 1858 of a choral society run by John Henry Ashley, but does not mention any performances by this group. Jan Bouws, in an article about Ashley's activities, refers to a performance in 1859 of 'fragments' from Romberg's *The Lay of the Bell* (a popular cantata of the time) and states that it was performed again in 1863 (Bouws, 1970: 215-6). Ashley's choral society thus appears also to have been a rather small group, which did not attempt oratorio. No doubt, however, its members would have been amongst those who were able to join with others for the 1863 *Messiah* performance, and Ashley's name appears on the programme as one of the soloists, singing 'Why do the nations' ('The Messiah', 1863, archival source).

The requisite occasion for the performance was provided by the plight of people described in the advertisements and the programme as 'the distressed Lancashire operatives'. These were workers in the textile industry of the north of England, who lost their work through the closure of cotton mills, as a result of the interruption of supplies of raw material, caused by the Union blockade of the South during the American Civil War (Dunlap, 1988: 166). What became known as the Lancashire cotton famine (1862-1864) mobilized official and private charity on an unprecedented scale (Glen, 1988: 474), not only in Britain but throughout the Empire. Cape Town sentiment is captured in one of the reviews of the performance: 'When the voice of

distress – too prevalent in our fatherland – is heard in this distant quarter, it is seldom that a deaf ear is turned against it' (*SACA*, 1863f).

The 'Town Talk' column referred to above gives credit to the Roman Catholic Bishop, Thomas Grimley for the original idea for the performance. We cannot be certain whether his original idea was simply to mount a concert for the benefit of the Lancashire operatives, or more specifically to perform *Messiah*. It is possible that he took up and developed an idea that had originated with Ashley, since in November 1862 the Cape Town Choral Society announced plans to give a concert to assist the distressed in Lancashire (*Volksblad*, 1862). (Indeed, there were several performers and performing groups, musical and theatrical, that gave special performances for the same cause at this time.) Perhaps Ashley was persuaded to expand this idea by Grimley, who would have had in mind the success of the 1855 'oratorio' that took place in the same building and was also in aid of a cause that seems to have caught the imagination and elicited a strong response from settlers throughout South Africa on behalf of their British compatriots. It is even possible that Ashley's choir formed the nucleus of singers, and that he undertook much of their training, although none of the sources specifically states this.

A complete performance of *Messiah* could be counted on not only to motivate the performers to unite, but was also sure to bring together a large audience with the financial means to benefit the charity, as had already been shown for many years in Britain. The association of *Messiah* with fund-raising, particularly for charitable causes, goes back to its very first performance in Dublin, which according to the announcement in the *Dublin Journal* was 'For Relief of the Prisoners in the several Gaols, and for the Support of Mercer's Hospital in Stephen's Street, and of the Charitable Infirmary on the Inns Quay' (quoted in Lockett, 1992: 121). This was to continue to be an important strand in its subsequent history. Myers (1948: 144) suggests that the reason why *Messiah* eventually became popular in London, after being treated with indifference for several years, was precisely its 'close identification with that charitable institution', the Foundling Hospital.

As has been noted (see above: 54), charitable events served a purpose not only for those who benefited from them but also for the elite, affording 'a way for them to confirm their social status and importance' (Harvey, n.d.). Referring to Handel's first performance of *Messiah* in aid of the Foundling Hospital, Myers comments that 'London's polite world, never slow to support fashionable charity, flocked to Lamb's-Conduit-Fields *en masse*' (1948: 138). By the time Charles Burney wrote his *Account* of the Handel Commemoration performances, published in 1785, he was already able to say that *Messiah* had 'fed the hungry, clothed the naked, fostered the orphan, and enriched succeeding managers of Oratorios, more than any single musical production in this or any country' (quoted in Burrows, 1991: vii). Myers goes on to note that 'throughout the Victorian period *Messiah* was the favourite composition for public charities of all kinds' (1948: 143). A positive association was thus created between *Messiah* and the idea of the general good of the whole society.

With particular reference to the new mercantile elite of Cape Town, Keegan (1996: 48-9) confirms a phenomenon that has already been encountered several times in this study, namely that they 'sought to replicate in the colonial world the pursuits deemed appropriate to their class position', and in this context he specifically mentions their

association with cultural and educational causes, and the recurring appearance of their names ‘on the committees of charitable and voluntary organisations’. It appears to have been the upper echelons of Cape Town society who were primarily involved in the promotion of the performance, and who attended it. The reviewer in the *SA Advertiser & Mail* notes the presence at the *Messiah* performance of ‘His Excellency the Governor and *suite*’ and describes the audience as ‘select’ (*SACA*, 1863f).

Bishop Grimley chaired the Committee of Management that was formed to oversee the event. The Secretary was R.W. Murray, who had founded the *Cape Argus* a few years earlier (Bosman, 1980: 142). In the second half of December 1862 notices appeared in the press announcing that ‘an oratorio’ would take place in the Roman Catholic Cathedral on 12 January 1863 (*SACA*, 1862b). This could, as in previous cases, have simply been the announcement of a concert of sacred music, probably including some excerpts from the most famous oratorios. On 3 January a further notice (headed ‘The Oratorio’) announced that ‘the first practice evening for local performers will be Tuesday next’, and that thereafter practices would take place twice a week on Tuesdays and Thursdays (*SACA*, 1863a). If the originally-announced date was to be adhered to, this would have allowed only two practices, so it must have been realised by this time that it would be necessary to postpone the performance to a later date, perhaps because the original idea was only now expanding into the plan to perform *Messiah* complete. If this is the case, the motivation for doing so could have come equally from those interested in the financial rewards for the charity, and from those interested in the musical rewards for the performers. A further notice later in January shows that the vocalists and instrumentalists were still rehearsing (*SACA*, 1863b). It is only at the end of February (*SACA*, 1863c) that the first advertisement appears which names *Messiah* as the work to be performed (almost certainly, therefore, the first advertisement for the complete work in South Africa).

The date finally decided upon for the performance, 4 March, would have given the performers about two months of regular rehearsal. The *SA Advertiser & Mail* reviewer felt that the delay in producing the performance was excusable ‘when the limited means of drawing together anything approaching to an adequate number of musical professors [sic] and amateurs in Cape Town are taken into consideration’ (*SACA*, 1863f). Ideas about the number of performers considered ‘adequate’ for a performance of *Messiah* at this time were of course influenced both by the size of Victorian English choral societies and by the ‘monumental’ image of Handel and his choruses. ‘To do Handel even ordinary justice,’ asserts the reviewer, ‘a large orchestra and a carefully-trained chorus are indispensable ... Something grand and imposing is called for ...’ This suggests that it was not only the idea of supporting a charitable cause, but also the idea of presenting *Messiah* itself that motivated performers to join together. The reviewer’s comments indicate clearly the complementary roles of the music and the cause:

In brief, Cape Town may be congratulated on the means it has at command on these occasions, and we can only trust that the *notes* received for the charitable purpose in question will prove proportionate to the notes volunteered by the liberal amateurs and professionals engaged in displaying their musical taste and philanthropy at one and the same time.

(*SACA*, 1863f)

Although the reviewer thus describes the choice of *Messiah* as ‘somewhat bold’, given that ‘all had to be accomplished on a small scale’, the scale was not in fact that small, at least by the standards of Handel’s own performances and many performances in more recent times. Certainly Cape Town could not match the writer’s probable standard for comparison, namely performances in England which were at this very time expanding to their largest size: at the first Handel Festival in the Crystal Palace in 1859, Sir Michael Costa conducted 2765 singers and 460 instrumentalists (Luckett, 1992: 221). For the Cape Town performance, the *Argus* reviewer estimates that there were about 120 performers (*CA*, 1863) while the programme (‘The Messiah’, 1863, archival source) lists the names of 70 chorus members, and indicates an orchestra of no less than 20 and possibly as many as 30.

In the chorus, there is an almost equal number of sopranos (21), tenors (18) and basses (20), but altos are in short supply (11). Since three of the sopranos and three of the altos were boys, and another seven altos were men, males outnumbered females in the chorus by a considerable margin: 51 to 19. (This contrasts with the complaints heard time and again in the twentieth century about a lack of men, particularly tenors, in choral societies.)

The orchestra is entirely male. There are 13 strings, made up of four first violins, four second violins, two violas, two cellos and one double bass. Added to this are flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, horns, trumpets, trombones, kettle drums and organ. The exact number of winds impossible to determine, because of the way the formula ‘Band 11th Regt.’ is used in the printed programme. Below are two examples:

<i>Clarionets</i> [sic]	<i>Oboes</i>
Mr Barron, Jr	Band 11th Regt.
Band 11th Regt	

The first could mean either that Mr Barron Jr was himself a member of the Band of the 11th Regiment, or that he was *joined* by a member of that band who is not named. The latter reading would seem to be confirmed by the second example, where the formula appears on its own, but since the heading is plural (*Oboes*), it seems that it could refer to *more* than one player. Or does it simply mean that at the time of going to print it was still uncertain exactly who would be playing? In any event, this is far from the motley crew which might have been expected, given that this was a ‘first attempt’ at *Messiah* with orchestral accompaniment in South Africa, and bearing in mind the unusual combinations to be encountered in other centres in later years. Apart, perhaps, from the small number of strings, it in fact conforms exactly with the composition of a *Messiah* orchestra which was regarded as ‘standard’ at the time and which can still be heard in many places today.

As regards the ethnic make-up of the performing group, the vast majority of names are English, but there are a few Dutch and German names amongst the strings and in the choir. The potential of an event such as this to draw together different segments of the population remained, but by this time British hegemony had been firmly established. According to Worden et al. (1998: 153) high culture was one of the ways in which the British asserted a social position which even by mid-century could not be secured simply by force of numbers in the population at large.

It can thus be seen how this performance could have brought together elements of all the previously-mentioned musical resources in Cape Town. It is fair to assume that individual 'amateurs' and 'professionals' were found in the orchestra and the choir, and that many of the choir members would also have been members of their own smaller church choirs. The boys and the male altos in the choir would most likely have come from a church with a tradition of all-male choirs, perhaps St Mary's Roman Catholic Cathedral itself or St George's Anglican Cathedral. The Dutch and German singers were probably members of the (all male) Dutch and German 'Liedertafel' groups (see Bouws, 1970: 215). The only group specifically mentioned is the Band of the 11th Regiment. Although this is not mentioned in the programme or the reviews, the conductor of this performance, Mr Barron, was also the Bandmaster of the 11th Regiment, as appears, for example, from an advertisement for a vocal and instrumental concert in September 1863 (SACA, 1863k).

How 'complete' was this first performance? The programme lists 37 of the 53 items in the score, which amounts to roughly 70%, although this does not take into account the fact that individual items differ considerably in length. This includes almost all the items in Parts 1 and 3, the greatest number of cuts being made in Part 2. Table 2 lists all 53 items (using the numbering of recent editions; earlier editions listed 57, the main difference being the subdivision of 'Since by man came death' into alternating 'quartet' and 'chorus' sections). The items omitted from the printed programme are shown in italics.

Table 2

PART 1	PART 2	PART 3
1. Overture	22. Behold the Lamb of God	45. I know that my redeemer liveth
2. Comfort ye	23. He was despised	46. Since by man came death
3. Every valley	24. Surely he hath borne our griefs	47. Behold I tell you
4. And the glory of the Lord	25. <i>And with his stripes</i>	48. The trumpet shall sound
5. Thus saith the Lord	26. All we like sheep	49. Then shall be brought to pass
6. But who may abide	27. <i>All they that see him</i>	(?)
7. <i>And he shall purify</i>	28. <i>He trusted in God</i>	50. O death where is thy sting (?)
8. Behold, a virgin shall conceive	29. <i>Thy rebuke hath broken</i>	51. But thanks be to God (?)
9. O thou that tellest	30. <i>Behold and see</i>	52. If God be for us (?)
10. For behold, darkness	31. He was cut off	53. <i>Worthy is the Lamb</i>
11. The people that walked in darkness	32. But thou didst not leave	
12. For unto us	33. Lift up your heads	
13. Pastoral Symphony	34. <i>Unto which of the angels</i>	
14. There were shepherds - And lo	35. <i>Let all the angels</i>	
15. And the angel said	36. <i>Thou art gone up on high</i>	
16. And suddenly	37. <i>The Lord gave the word</i>	
17. Glory to God	38. How beautiful are the feet	
18. <i>Rejoice greatly</i>	39. Their sound is gone out (?)	
19. Then shall the eyes	40. Why do the nations	
20. He shall feed his flock	41. <i>Let us break their bonds</i>	
21. <i>His yoke is easy</i>	42. <i>He that dwelleth in heaven</i>	
	43. <i>Thou shalt break them</i>	
	44. Hallelujah (different location, at the end of the whole work)	

It is possible that five of the items given on the programme were not in fact performed: they are indicated with question marks. The review in the *Argus* discusses, in order, every item performed, but these five are not mentioned. The programme gives Mr Butler as the soloist in 'If God be for us' (52), but neither review mentions his name amongst the soloists. It is clear that in at least one case the performance did

not match the programme: the latter gives Mr Littlewort as the soloist in ‘He was despised’, but both reviews state that it was sung by a ‘young lady’, and the *SACA* names her as Miss Henry. Since the items in question are all amongst those that are most often cut (especially 49-52), it seems to me probable that they were not sung. It would still be safe to say that not less than 60% of the items were performed, which is a very respectable proportion compared with most performances at the time or since.

Any review assumes the existence of standards according to which the performance may be judged. Though these are seldom stated explicitly, they may be inferred from the specific judgements that are made. Unsurprisingly (as suggested above in relation to the question of the requisite number of performers) European models are the point of reference. This is clear when, for example, the *SACA* reviewer says of the bass soloist’s performance in ‘The trumpet shall sound’: ‘Many an *artiste* of no inconsiderable standing in Europe would be glad of Mr Parminter’s equality and range of voice.’ The *SACA*’s ‘Town Talk’ column hints that it was not only the reviewers but also members of the audience who affected knowledge of performances understood to set the standards for this one, though the writer does express a certain impatience with them: ‘Of course, many had heard the same glorious composition better executed vocally and instrumentally elsewhere, but I won’t listen to any carping criticism’ (*SACA*, 1863j). Not only did the reviewers evaluate the performances according to British standards, they clearly modelled their own work on the discourse of British music criticism, and much of the writing suggests the recycling of familiar formulae established in that discourse.

As mentioned above, the *Argus* review comments on each item in order, while the *SACA* review discusses in turn the contributions of the orchestra, the conductor, the soloists and the choruses. There is broad agreement between them that the choruses and solos were well managed. Neither mentions any specific criticism of the choruses. The *SACA* reviewer simply lists the choruses regarded as having been ‘most prominent in effect’; the *Argus* reviewer expresses general approval of each offering, sometimes with a little more detail, as in the case of ‘Lift up your heads’, which is deemed ‘a great triumph; the query “Who is the King of Glory?” being delivered with the proper sharpness and clearness, and the response, “The Lord strong and mighty” coming in with a crashing mass of sound’.

Both reviews devote more attention to the solos. Certain solos are identified as being among the ‘gems’ of the evening, either as compositions or as performances (though different ones are highlighted by each writer). Both reviewers suggest that a particular soloist (though again a different one in each case) would have been applauded had this been permitted by ‘the sacred nature of the edifice’ (*CA*, 1863b). Their only significant difference concerns Miss Henry: the *SACA* says she sang ‘He was despised’ ‘in a very pleasing manner, and promises well’, but the *Argus* says she ‘was so nervous that it was impossible to say what she might or might not have done had it not been for this unfortunate constitutional impediment’.

The orchestra comes in for a fair amount of criticism from both writers, though again they differ on matters of detail. The *Argus* says that the Overture ‘was played with great precision, and in the true Handelian style’, but the *SACA* questions whether ‘it would not have been more judicious to have omitted the overture, since the stringed instruments, with few exceptions, lacked tone and expression’, and goes on to suggest

that in general it was only ‘the round and full tones of the well-played organ’ that prevented the orchestral shortcomings from being more apparent. To a certain extent the reviewers reverse their positions when it comes to the ‘Pastoral Symphony’: the *SACA* suggests that it made partial amends for earlier faults because it was ‘better executed’ and ‘received a little better treatment’, but the *Argus* asserts that ‘it was too loud – the wind instruments particularly – the peculiar, drowsy style of this quaint little composition being ignored’. The same writer censures the orchestra for being too loud in the accompaniment of ‘How beautiful are the feet’ and of the trumpet obbligato in ‘The trumpet shall sound’. The *SACA* reviewer complains that ‘some of the accompaniments were dragged to a degree which served materially to mar the efforts of the singer, and it is scarcely to be wondered that Miss Longmore more than once cast a look of embarrassment towards the offenders for their incorrectness both in tone and time’.

It is notable that the conductor, to whose role the success of a performance is attributed in many early reviews, on this occasion receives little credit from either writer. The *Argus* review does not even mention him, while the *SACA* review, having criticised the orchestral playing, comments:

Matters were not mended by the conductor, who seemed to imagine there was more music in his baton than in the instruments, for he most mercilessly beat time on his music stand, to the detriment of all harmony. We were almost inclined to believe he had discovered a part for the baton in Handel’s score.

(*SACA*, 1863f)

It seems possible that, as a military bandmaster, Barron was, if not out of his depth, at least in somewhat unfamiliar waters here. One wonders if he was asked to conduct primarily in order to secure the participation of the band members, or whether there was no one else who felt able to take on the conducting of both a large choir and orchestra.

Whatever its deficiencies, as already mentioned the performance was generally hailed as a triumph. The editorial in the *SACA* conveys clearly the sense of a notable achievement and obstacles overcome:

For a number of professionals and amateurs, seldom accustomed to appear together, to attempt so grand an Oratorio as the *Messiah* – and in the face of innumerable difficulties, to represent it so as to sustain the unflagging interest of a crowded and not altogether uncritical audience, in a most uncomfortable *locale*, for a period of about four hours, is a task the accomplishment of which merits, as it has secured, very cordial applause.

(*SACA*, 1863e)

Its status in the local community is illustrated by the *SACA*’s ‘Town Talk’ column, where a link is made between attendance at the performance and social approval: ‘Who, I should like to know, has not heard it and talked about it? If there be any such readers, they ought to be ashamed of themselves, that’s all. Every one who went came away delighted, enraptured’ (*SACA*, 1863j). Even though this is not entirely serious, it does suggest the social pressure that could be brought to bear on people to attend such an event.

One sign of its success, and the interest it aroused, is the fact that a second performance was announced for the evening of 6 March (two days after the first performance) ‘in consequence of the great demand for tickets, which it was found

impossible to completely satisfy' (CA, 1863a). There were even appeals for further performances. The editorial asks:

Cannot some arrangement be made for a morning performance? There are many, both from town and country, who would be delighted to avail themselves of it who cannot possibly attend at nights [sic] Could not some such arrangement be adopted as was made for the Oratorio for the Patriotic Fund in 1855?

(SACA, 1863e).

This last comment suggests that there was indeed a sense that *Messiah* was now integral to a tradition of significant performances that had brought performers and audiences together over the years – musical milestones, as it were, remembered as marking the steady cultural progress of the community and its ongoing commitment to activities that linked it to the culture and people of England.

It was not only people who had been unable to attend the performance who wanted it repeated. There were those whose experience produced a desire to hear it again, and this would have become an important motivation for future performances, reaching beyond the immediate context of this one. The writer of the 'Town Talk' column represents a point of view which was likely a significant factor in establishing a *Messiah* 'tradition' in Cape Town and elsewhere: 'Let us hear it once more. We will pay and listen again to the glorious strains which teach us charity while we exercise it' (SACA, 1863j).

This also shows that for some listeners the custom of performing *Messiah* for charity was supported by a perceived connection with the content of the work itself. In expanding on this theme, the writer represents *Messiah* as having a positive moral and religious effect not only through its words, but specifically through the words as enhanced by the music:

We sat and listened entranced while the soul-stirring strains of the immortal master rolled through the sacred edifice. Evil thoughts and passions were banished from our minds for the time. Good Will Shakespeare could find 'sermons in stone and good in everything' – and the man or woman who could listen unedified and unimproved to the doctrines of our faith so grandly, harmoniously, and exquisitely preached as they were on Tuesday week, and again on Friday, will never profit by any sermon or service in St Mary's or any other Cathedral or Church.

(SACA, 1863j)

The way Christianity is here taken for granted as 'our faith' shows its continuing importance for this community:

Mid-century Cape Town could be described as a religious society. A high proportion of the inhabitants participated in religious ceremonies. Amongst the white middle-classes church attendance was a mark of respectability But the impress of religion went further, for it shaped the moral world of colonial society and was an integral part of ethnic identity in Cape Town.

(Worden, Van Heyningen, & Bickford-Smith, 1998: 184)

The importance of *Messiah* for these listeners was therefore greatly strengthened by the understanding that it 'preached' Christian doctrine.

The possibility that a *Messiah* performance offered Christians an opportunity to transcend denominational and doctrinal differences has already been suggested in the context of earlier performances. It becomes an explicit theme in the *SACA* review:

Cape Town has come nobly forward on this occasion, and infinite credit is due to all parties concerned in uniting – with one or two exceptions – to meet on neutral ground in the cause of philanthropy We trust that instead of being a solitary instance of the zeal of the Churches to combine in the worship of the Deity, practically, through contributing towards the wants of the suffering community, we may have to record many similar acts of charity on the part of those who, irrespective of creed, have so nobly come forward

(*SACA*, 1863f)

To those for whom such Christian unity was desirable, it was important to highlight it precisely as it was threatened from various quarters. While the remarks quoted above show one construction of the event, there is on this occasion clear evidence of an opposing viewpoint, which might serve as a useful reminder of the possibility that such alternatives might exist even when specific evidence has not survived.

The evidence in this case is provided by a controversy that arose over the tickets of admission having been decorated with the symbol of the cross. While some emphasised the cross as the (unifying) common property of all Christians, others highlighted its specific (divisive) association with Roman Catholicism. A short letter to the *SACA* from ‘A Reader’ represents the former position, urging those who found fault with the tickets to ‘think not only of the sacred character of the building, but also that of the performance. It is *extraordinary* that the “majority of the *Christian* community” should be *offended* by the emblem of their salvation’ (1863g, italics in original). A longer, unsigned letter replies:

The Cross has indeed been the symbol of Christianity, but it has been so much abused as to have excited much scandal amongst Protestants, and for some years has been, amongst others, a mark of a party that sympathises with the Romanists. It may be improper prejudice that objects now to the prominence of this symbol, but the feeling exists extensively, and is known well to exist; and it was therefore inexpedient to stamp it upon the cards of admission to a public exhibition in a Romish place of worship.

(*SACA*, 1863h)

It is in the course of arguing this case that this second writer makes several illuminating remarks about attitudes to performances such as that of *Messiah*, providing a different perspective from the dominant one already noted:

The community looked upon the proposed Oratorio simply as an exhibition of music to gratify their musical taste and their curiosity; and they would have deemed it a piece of blasphemous hypocrisy to pretend to think it, as such, a form of honouring God. The endeavour to make out that it differed in its object from the performance at the Circus or the theatre for the benefit of the Manchester Operatives, in being a religious service for the glory of God, would rather give weight to a suspicion that the Romish Bishop had designed to entrap the Protestants into a religious service in a Romish church, and endeavoured to give more or less effect to the influence of grand music, by stamping the tickets of admission with the symbol of Romanism Vast numbers of people object very strongly to symbols and ceremonials, and the singing in cathedrals, described as a mode of worship; but still they go, some

to gratify curiosity, some to follow a fashion, and see and hear what others have seen and heard and talk about.

It was not only between Catholics and Protestants that religious tensions existed. A controversy originating within the Anglican Church in Natal, but with much wider theological implications for all Christians, was brought to the attention of Capetonians at the same time as the *Messiah* performance. For those who found a religious significance in the latter (*pace* the dismissal of such a possibility just quoted), it seems unlikely that the current religious controversy could have been entirely absent from their thoughts as they listened to the music.

Immediately above the advertisement for *Messiah* in the *SACA* was another advertisement (1863d), for an event taking place the evening before the performance. The heading was 'Bishop Colenso and the Pentateuch', and it announced that the Rev T.J. Gaster, a 'church missionary', would give 'a Lecture on the Views put forth by the Bishop of Natal'. It was the publication of these 'views' that sparked the controversy. By the end of the year, Colenso was being tried for heresy by the Anglican Bishop of Cape Town, Robert Gray, and this resulted eventually in a split between the Church of the Province of South Africa (Gray) and the Church of England in South Africa (Colenso) (Donaldson, 1994: 84-5).

It is clear from the text of Gaster's lecture, published in the *SACA* (1863i), that his purpose was not to explain or support Colenso's views, but rather to refute them and reaffirm the orthodox position. The 'Town Talk' column that gave pride of place to the *Messiah* performance and asserted its positive effect, immediately goes on to discuss the lecture, and asserts *its* positive effect in counteracting the negative influence of Colenso's views:

That lecture on Bishop Colenso and the Pentateuch ... has also been a topic of talk during the week that has gone. It was high time that somebody raised their voice in public against the insidious errors which the Bishop's book is calculated to disseminate – and all honor, say I, to Mr Gaster, for the manly way in which he has stepped forth to vindicate the genuineness and authenticity of the Sacred Text.

(*SACA*, 1863j)

The writer is concerned about the 'cause of religion' being 'violated by the spread of errors which soon become popular with the world', and states that local booksellers could confirm that 'there must be at least 1000 or even more readers of Colenso's book in this city.' Can it be doubted that for this writer at least, the juxtaposition of the performance and the lecture implicitly places *Messiah* firmly on the side of orthodoxy? This point will be considered more fully in the next section, since the second complete performance of *Messiah* not only took place in the city where Colenso was bishop, but was in fact the result of an initiative by a man who has been described as Colenso's 'great antagonist' (Gordon, 1981: 104), even his 'most bitter opponent' (Hinchliff, 1964: 170), the Dean of the Anglican cathedral in Pietermaritzburg, James Green.

Pietermaritzburg, 1864: a nick on time's tally

Pietermaritzburg, as its name proclaims, was founded by the Voortrekkers. After the British annexation of Natal as a Colony in 1843, most of the Afrikaners left, to be replaced by new arrivals from Britain, especially in the years 1849-51 when some 5000 settlers arrived in Natal, assisted by the Byrne scheme (L. Thompson, 2000 [1990]: 95). Hubert van der Spuy's (1975) research on the early musical life of Pietermaritzburg takes 1850 as its starting date. Van der Spuy conducted a thorough search of the *Natal Witness* for reports of musical performances. It is remarkable that the first choral performance which he found, dating from 1864, should be a complete performance of *Messiah*, bearing in mind the much more tentative beginnings that we have seen in other centres, and the fact that the white population was still very small. It is possible to make a rough comparison between Pietermaritzburg and Cape Town, the only other place where a complete performance had been presented, since figures are available for Pietermaritzburg in 1863 (3,118), and for Cape Town in 1865 (15,100): allowing for some growth in the two years that separate these figures, it nevertheless suggests that Cape Town's white population was four to five times greater (Wills, 1988: 33; Worden, Van Heyningen, & Bickford-Smith, 1998: 177). The absence of any existing tradition of musical performances receives confirmation from one of the reviewers: 'It is next door to incredible, that in a place where hitherto there has actually been a dearth of music, so many of the airs of the *Messiah* could be sung by a large band of volunteers, ladies and gentlemen, as they were sung on Wednesday' (*NW*, 1864b).

The performance did not spring entirely out of nothing, however. It was advertised as being given by 'the Choirs of the Cathedral and St Andrew's', the two (white) Anglican churches in Pietermaritzburg, 'assisted by several Amateurs' (*NW*, 1864a). Both churches had been opened in the 1850s: St Andrew's in 1855 and the Cathedral (St Peter's) in 1857 (Darby & Maxwell, 1988: 167). It seems likely that, although they did not give public performances that would have been reported in the *Witness*, these choirs had been developing, in their preparation of music for services, some of the skills that enabled the performance to take place. It is even possible that a chorus or aria from *Messiah* had been sung during a service, since members of the Cathedral choir took some of the solos in the complete performance, and it was conducted by the Cathedral organist, R. Benjamin Moorby.

St Peter's Cathedral was the venue, and in this case two performances were planned from the start, one on the evening of Wednesday 6 January (Twelfth Night), followed by another on the Friday evening. The performers spent about two months in preparation (*NM*, 1864). During that time much interest was aroused, as illustrated by the writer of one of the pre-performance reports who eavesdropped on the rehearsals: 'From what we have heard in our moonlight rambles round the Cathedral, we certainly expect the best musical entertainment that has yet been given in the City' (*NW*, 1863). The same report informs us that 'the proceeds go towards the Church improvements', but (in contrast to the Cape Town event) the fundraising aspect did not receive much emphasis.

What is even more clear than in Cape Town is the sense of history being made by this event: 'Another nick on time's tally in Natal!' announces the *Natal Witness*, continuing: 'On Wednesday evening, the first Oratorio of sacred music was

performed in the colony' (*NW*, 1864b). Later the writer refers grandly to 'the first conductor's baton that has swayed choral voices in a sacred Oratorio between the Tugela and the Umzimkulu.' One measure of the event's significance for the community is simply the extent of the reporting. Both the *Witness* (based in Pietermaritzburg) and the *Mercury* (based in Durban) published long reviews of each of the two performances. The reviews of the first performance in the two papers contain sufficient similarities to prompt the question whether they might have been written by the same person, or at least whether the *Mercury* reviewer had read the *Witness* review. The latter was published on 8 January, the *Mercury* review only on 12 January, being followed under the same heading by the review of the second performance, 'from another source' (*NM*, 1864).

The *Natal Mercury*'s proclamation that 'The first performance of an Oratorio, and that Handel's "Messiah," – is an event in the annals of the city' (*NM*, 1864) shows how the unquestioned status of *Messiah* could be used to confirm the importance of the community's achievement. The *Witness* refers to *Messiah* with a now-familiar phrase: 'the grandest work of the mightiest master', and the *Mercury* continues: 'It is no slight benefit to have conferred upon a colonial population, to have shown them how high a gratification is connected with this species of musical performance, and to have done this by introducing them to one of the glories of its class.' The fact that the performers could manage so esteemed and important a work demonstrates the skill and talent present in the community, and this in turn provides a measure by which to evaluate the worth of the community itself. According to the first *Mercury* reviewer, the performance showed 'what a fair share of musical talent the colony, and even the city itself, possesses, and how creditably it can furnish the resources necessary for the introduction of a long and varied musical work' (*NM*, 1864). The second reviewer contrasts the sentiments of those who, 'ever doubtful of colonial ability, anticipated a failure', with the feeling (after the performance) of 'unmingled surprise that such results could be accomplished so far from England, and in a place so small as the capital of Natal must, after all, be acknowledged to be' (*ibid*).

This last comment shows how *Messiah* and England acted as twin sources of validation for the colonial community. This is made clear by the way the first *Witness* review places the Pietermaritzburg performance within an implied narrative of colonial progress, constructed explicitly in terms of the extent to which the culture of the colony approximates that of the metropole:

It is certainly amongst the most pleasant privileges of young colonization to be able to note, step by step, and day by day, the introduction of new features and characteristics of old civilization within its community. The very first performance of the *Messiah* marked one very important stage in the early life of Natal.

(*NW*, 1864b)

As far as evaluating the success of the performance is concerned, there are several references confirming the importance of English standards as a reference point. In support of the need for continuity in the performance, the *Witness* reviewer claims: 'Those who have been in the habit of hearing this Oratorio as it is now given in the best orchestras in England, will at once bow to this canon' (*ibid*). The same reviewer emphasises the success achieved by the trumpeter, Mr Otto Wirsing, in 'The trumpet shall sound' by stating: 'It is no small thing to say, that an ear that has been accustomed to Harper's trumpet in that obligato [sic], and is quite inclined to be

fastidious in the matter, found full enjoyment in it.' At the same time, of course, the reviewer is demonstrating familiarity with English performers and performance practice, and thereby giving greater authority and credibility to the judgements being made.

The newspaper advertisements announced that 'a portion, about two-thirds' of *Messiah* would be performed, but it is clear that this performance can be regarded as 'complete' in terms of the criteria suggested at the beginning of this chapter. The newspapers did not print the programme, and one does not appear to have survived, but it is nevertheless possible to attempt a reconstruction from the four very comprehensive reviews. 28 items are specifically mentioned in the reviews. Table 3 again lists all 53 items; those probably *not* performed are shown in italics. Nine items, not specifically mentioned in the reviews, were nevertheless very probably performed, being either recitatives attached to arias which are specified as having been sung, or else some of the most popular choruses: one of the reviews states that 'hardly one of the favorite and most-admired pieces or choruses' was omitted (*NM*, 1864a). These items are indicated with question marks. If they are included in the count, the total number of items performed is 37, which at 70% matches the 'about two-thirds' stated in the newspapers.

Table 3

<p>PART 1</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Overture 2. Comfort ye 3. Every valley 4. And the glory of the Lord (?) 5. Thus saith the Lord 6. But who may abide 7. <i>And he shall purify</i> 8. Behold, a virgin shall conceive (?) 9. O thou that tellest 10. For behold, darkness 11. The people that walked in darkness 12. For unto us 13. Pastoral Symphony 14. There were shepherds - And lo 15. And the angel said 16. And suddenly 17. Glory to God (?) 18. Rejoice greatly 19. Then shall the eyes (?) 20. He shall feed his flock 21. <i>His yoke is easy</i> 	<p>PART 2</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 22. Behold the Lamb of God (?) 23. He was despised 24. Surely he hath borne our griefs 25. <i>And with his stripes</i> 26. <i>All we like sheep</i> 27. <i>All they that see him</i> 28. <i>He trusted in God</i> 29. Thy rebuke hath broken 30. Behold and see 31. He was cut off 32. But thou didst not leave 33. Lift up your heads (?) 34. <i>Unto which of the angels</i> 35. <i>Let all the angels</i> 36. <i>Thou art gone up on high</i> 37. <i>The Lord gave the word</i> 38. How beautiful are the feet 39. <i>Their sound is gone out</i> 40. <i>Why do the nations</i> 41. <i>Let us break their bonds</i> 42. He that dwelleth in heaven (?) 43. Thou shalt break them 44. Hallelujah 	<p>PART 3</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 45. I know that my redeemer liveth 46. Since by man came death (?) 47. Behold I tell you (?) 48. The trumpet shall sound 49. <i>Then shall be brought to pass</i> 50. <i>O death where is thy sting</i> 51. <i>But thanks be to God</i> 52. If God be for us 53. Worthy is the Lamb
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In terms of length, this performance therefore corresponds very closely to the Cape Town one, though a comparison of Tables 2 and 3 will show that there are a few differences in the specific items performed. The selection from Part 1 is almost identical, the Pietermaritzburg performance adding the aria 'Rejoice greatly', omitted in Cape Town. In Part 2, Nos. 26, 39 and 40 were sung in Cape Town but probably omitted in Pietermaritzburg, while 29/30 and 42/43 were sung in Pietermaritzburg but not in Cape Town. In Part 3, the main difference is that the Pietermaritzburg singers tackled the long final chorus, whereas in Cape Town the 'Hallelujah' chorus was

moved from its position at the end of Part 2, to act as a conclusion to the whole performance. It is difficult to make any other meaningful comparisons regarding Part 3 because of the uncertainties as to what was actually performed on each occasion.

The choir for the Pietermaritzburg performance was smaller than that in Cape Town, possibly only half its size. A pre-performance report states that ‘the chorus will consist of between forty and fifty voices’ (*NW*, 1863), while the reviews estimate the number to be ‘upwards of thirty voices’ (*NM*, 1864) or ‘between thirty and forty voices’ (*NW*, 1864b). Nevertheless, the reviewers do not bemoan a lack of power. The *Witness* review (1864b) says that ‘the volume of sound was quite equal to the building’, while the *Mercury* (1864) says it was ‘such as to surprise the majority of listeners, who, no doubt, were prepared to be struck first and most of all by a meagreness in this respect.’

The most significant difference between the two performances lay in the accompaniment. While Cape Town could put together an orchestra, the Pietermaritzburg performance was accompanied on a harmonium. A single violin, played by the conductor, was used to sustain the chorus ‘in forte passages’, (*NW*, 1864b), and a solo trumpet was featured in ‘The trumpet shall sound’. The *Witness* reviewer of the second performance regrets that ‘For unto us’ ‘was marred by the introduction of a drum, not at all suited to the tone of the chorus’ (*NW*, 1864c): it is not certain whether this addition was made for the second performance only, or simply not mentioned in the first review. Apart from these three instruments, used in specific items, the entire accompaniment, including the Overture and the Pastoral Symphony, was provided by the harmonium. The player’s achievement was singled out for special praise in the reviews, not simply because the accompaniments were well played, but because they exceeded expectations shaped by current notions of age, gender and relevant experience.

The Dean, instead of securing the assistance of some manly player of strong nerve and firm hand, had rashly, it might be thought, intrusted [sic] it to a young lady; had she faltered or failed the whole performance would have broken down, but she thoroughly justified the confidence reposed in her.

(*NM*, 1864)

If what rumor says be true, that this lady has never yet enjoyed the advantage of hearing *Messiah* performed by finished and practised artists, the wonder becomes so much the greater, and can only be solved on one hypothesis; that, namely, that the soul of Handel was inspiring the fingers That upon so short an acquaintance with the music of the *Messiah*, the entire accompaniment of its grandest choruses, and most beautiful airs, should have been sustained without one faltering passage, or one misplaced note, is an event that leaves no doubt of the auspicious fact – Maritzburg has within its community at least one consummate and accomplished musician.

(*NW*, 1864b)

None of the reviews mentions the name of the player, but she is identified in the pre-performance report as Miss Visick (*NW*, 1863). A letter to the *Witness* in 1989 from Richard Haw of Gillitts states that it was his grandmother, ‘Mrs Visick (wife of R.C. Visick, Master of the Supreme Court)’ who played for that first performance (*NW*, 1989). His comment that ‘it has come down my family’s history that the first performance of *The Messiah* was in 1864’ suggests how this performance became

something of a local legend, notable not only at the time but also as the starting point of a long tradition. Indeed, it allowed the Pietermaritzburg Philharmonic Society to make a proud claim, right into the 1990s, that it was continuing an unbroken series of annual performances that had begun in 1864. The historical basis for this claim will be considered in Chapter 8 (see below: 114).

The reviews express amazement at the extent to which the harmonium was able to substitute effectively for the orchestral instruments. The *Mercury* review of the first performance maintains that the playing ‘awoke happy, not regretful, memories’ of the same passages when played by the strings, while the *Witness* comments:

To any one who knows what elastic instruments the violins and mouth instruments of a large orchestra are, and what an inelastic substitute for such aids the harmonium must necessarily be, it will ever remain among the marvels of nature how such an effort as that of Wednesday evening was carried through.

(*NW*, 1864b)

Although the reviews do not explicitly refer to the sheer physical stamina required to keep pumping a harmonium for this length of time, one wonders whether this may have been, at least in part, the reason for the one aspect of the performance which receives ‘admonitory criticism’ (*NW*, 1864b), namely the lack of continuous flow from one item to the next. On the basis of two principles – musical contrast and the steady unfolding of a single idea in the text – the *Natal Witness* reviewer (1864b) argues that there should be

no break or pause into which the distraction of gossiping talk, or even of gossiping criticism, can be intruded. The feelings and thoughts must be kept in continuous rapport with the music, or half its mighty charm is withdrawn There must be no listless pause in which the mind can drop into indifference, whence it has again to be pulled up by a fresh start.

The first *Mercury* review similarly describes ‘the allowing of an interval between the separate pieces’ as a ‘small mistake or oversight’ in the performance, which resulted in one of the ‘highest effects of the music’ being obscured:

The portion last heard is liable to be lost before the next is begun; which is therefore not reviewed so closely in connection with what preceded, as to allow of its full effect, that which arises from its place in the whole scheme of the work, as well as from its individual beauty being recognized and appreciated. It is evident that manifold points of climax and of contrast, both probably among the highest and most treasured efforts of the composer, and those which mark out his productions as the finished work of a master hand, are in danger of being missed

(*NM*, 1864)

Apart from this the conductor receives praise from the reviewers for his efforts. The second *Mercury* reviewer describes him as ‘evidently quite a young man, but whose zeal, ability, and perseverance lie at the bottom of the success of the festival’, while the first comments that his conspicuous skill and energy

showed him to possess great knowledge and ability as a musician. Of the unwearied exertions he must have used to bring his band of singers to the state of certainty and harmony they have attained, it is impossible to speak in terms of too high praise.

This reviewer comments specifically on their training in the matter of time, certainty of attack, with, on the whole, correctness of tune, and the point which the several parts of the chorus had reached in blending together, so as to produce a really harmonious whole.

A large number of amateur volunteers took the solos. Apart from Moorby himself, who sang 'The trumpet shall sound', the pre-performance report mentions the names of ten other soloists. The reviewers write about their contributions with appreciation, although the *Mercury* notes that 'solos which test the quality, power, and cultivation of each voice singly, are a fair subject for criticism only in the case of professional performers'. The reviews of the first performance in both newspapers describe several solos, but avoid mentioning the names of the singers, because of their amateur status. The reviews of the second performance do mention some names, but only of male soloists. The first *Witness* reviewer goes to considerable lengths to find ways of referring to particular soloists without actually mentioning their names, and in one case this resulted in an elaborate description that has misled at least one earlier researcher, on a matter of some significance.

When John Mitchell became musical director for the Pietermaritzburg Philharmonic Society in 1985, he undertook some research on the early musical history of the city, which included a perusal of the first *Witness* review of this *Messiah* performance. During a discussion with me of Pietermaritzburg's long association with *Messiah*, he mentioned that at this first performance 'there was a black soprano' (Mitchell interview, 1997). Given the social and historical context, this seemed quite astonishing. Here is the relevant passage from the review:

Among the white plumaged birds there was one black bird, which opened its mouth with the most difficult piece in the Oratorio, "Rejoice greatly O daughter of Zion;" and opened its mouth in such a way, as to show that it knew pretty well what it was about, and to let out some secrets as to what had been going on for some time behind the scenes during preparation, in addition to its own music. It is clear that more than one white bird has already taken a lesson from the black bird. The black bird is obviously at home in Handel; and with the sweet quality of its voice, and its pure, clever management of the organ, is a host in itself.

(*NW*, 1864b)

For some time I read this passage with Mitchell's statement in mind, and the figure of a lone black soprano at this performance began to haunt my imagination. Who was she? How did she come to be involved in the event, and how did she so quickly develop the musical knowledge and skill to tackle this difficult aria? The review hinted at training that might have been taking place before the performance ('in addition to its own music' perhaps being a reference to the traditional Zulu music already known to the singer), and that her progress had been such as to provide a model for some of the other singers. I wondered if the 'black bird' could have been Salome Welwayo, whose extraordinary and poignant story had, at the time I began this research, recently been retold by Pietermaritzburg author Chris Lake in his novel, *Across the Barrier* (*NW*, 1996). Many pieces seemed to fit: she had been taken to England and educated there, becoming an accomplished musician and returning to marry a colonial farmer. Lake even imagines her playing the organ for a performance of *Messiah* in an English village church (Lake, 1996: 54-5), but as it turned out the

dates were wrong: in 1864 she would have been too young, the visit to England taking place only in the 1870s.

Returning to the original text, I noticed that the first reference to colour came in a passage that contrasted the solo contributions made by the ‘gentlemen’ with those of the ‘warblers that wore the white plumage’. This suggests more strongly than the passage quoted above that the ‘plumage’ is not referring to skin colour at all, but to the white dresses worn by the female soloists. The second *Mercury* review, describing the entrance of the female choristers (‘the prettiest spectacle of the evening’), says that they too had ‘mostly selected white for their attire’. We may suppose that amongst the soloists was one who wore a black dress. ‘Its own music’ therefore refers simply to the aria sung by this person in the performance; ‘what has been going on behind the scenes during preparation’ is not the training of this singer, but her training of others: this is the sense in which ‘more than one white bird has already taken a lesson from the black bird’. This may be a less interesting reading than Mitchell’s one, but it is more probable both in terms of what is said in the text itself, and in terms of the social context in which the performance took place.

The first *Witness* review refers to another female soloist as ‘one near to the prime mover in this musical festival’. In this case her identity is not in doubt, since later in the review the writer describes the Dean of the cathedral as the person who ‘planned and carried out’ the musical festival. The first *Mercury* review says that it was the Dean ‘with whom the idea originated’. On his arrival in 1849, James Green was the first Anglican clergyman in Pietermaritzburg (Darby & Maxwell, 1988: 167). He became Dean when Colenso constituted a cathedral chapter in 1856 (Hinchliff, 1964: 69) and was to remain so until his death in 1906 (Gordon, 1981: 105).

Peter Hinchliff describes Green as ‘one of the hardest working priests in South Africa’ (1964: 65), and this energy would certainly have been an asset as he undertook the pioneering organization of the *Messiah* performance. He was a product of the Oxford Movement, ‘a narrow “catholic” with a “medievalist” theology: ‘He looked back on the great Church of the middle ages and he tried to behave as he thought men behaved when the Church dominated society, when ecclesiastical courts were materially powerful’ (ibid: 61, 65). According to Hinchliff, ‘Green and Colenso disliked each other from the start’ (ibid: 61). A controversy about the theology of the Eucharist led in 1858 to Green presenting Colenso to the metropolitan, Bishop Robert Gray of Cape Town, for heresy (ibid: 72-3). At this point Gray supported Colenso and refused to institute proceedings against him, but in the early 1860s Colenso published his commentaries on Paul’s Letter to the Romans and on the first six books of the Bible, and the views he expressed in these led to an ecclesiastical trial presided over by Gray, at which he was found guilty of heresy (Darby, 1988: 174). The details of these disputes are less important for present purposes than the fact that Colenso was widely understood, not only by the church hierarchy but also by the general public, to have challenged the authority of the Bible, and especially the Old Testament.

Although Green had earlier written to Gray complaining about *Romans*, he did not agree to act formally as promoter of the charges against Colenso, a circumstance which Hinchliff recognizes as curious (1964: 116). Green suggested to Gray that if the promoter came from elsewhere it would demonstrate that only ‘pure motives’ were involved (ibid: 117). Green may have been concerned that his long-standing disputes

with Colenso would make it seem that the heresy charges emanated from personal animus (and indeed after the verdict was given, one of Colenso's complaints was that 'his bitterest enemy, Green, had had a hand in framing the rules of the court' (ibid: 138)). There may also have been another reason for Green's reluctance, suggested by the *Messiah* performance itself. In 1862 Colenso had gone to England on a visit which was ultimately to last three years, and perhaps Green was satisfied that in Colenso's absence – 'no longer feeding his flock with "poison" from the pulpit' (ibid: 116) – he could best consolidate his own position by creating general goodwill and avoiding any appearance of stirring up controversy himself. If there is anything in this speculation, it seems possible that the *Messiah* performance became part of that strategy. It was something for which the local community could work together, in the face of potentially divisive issues, under the Dean's leadership. Certainly the press reports cast him in a very positive light: the first *Witness* review says that the town is indebted to the Dean 'for having planned and carried out a musical festival, which has given very great enjoyment, and which will exert high and good influences in time yet to come' (*NW*, 1864b).

This last statement about its positive effect suggests why, whatever the initial reasons for mounting the performance, *Messiah* would have come to seem a particularly appropriate choice for presentation by anyone who, like Rev Gaster in Cape Town (see above: 69), was concerned about 'the views of the Bishop of Natal'. With its unassailable credentials as 'sacred music in its highest form' (*NM*, 1864), *Messiah* could surely be relied on to counteract whatever 'insidious errors' (*SACA* 1863j) were emanating from the pen of Colenso. The first *Mercury* reviewer explicitly refers to the 'elevating influences' of 'this class of compositions', and expresses the hope that the inhabitants of Natal may 'never again be without the chance of experiencing [them] anew from time to time'. This writer also indicates clearly an understanding of the work as a presentation of the Christian gospel: 'Again and again may Handel be allowed to tell them that story, which it concerns all the world to hear' (*NM*, 1864). The first *Witness* review echoes the idea of Handel as (supreme) preacher: 'He has taken a theme for his masterpiece which he has been able to fill with meaning that even the most eloquent and expert preachers have hitherto failed to come near' (*NW*, 1864b).

If *Messiah* was understood to present the Christian message, the fact that it was here performed at the initiative of a man known to oppose the 'heresy' represented by Colenso, would inevitably suggest that it was a work with impeccably 'orthodox' credentials. It would be understood not simply as a Christian work, but as a work that supported what was then regarded as the orthodox version of Christianity, in a situation where an opposing view had been presented. This role had in fact been implicit in the intentions of the man who provided the libretto of *Messiah*, Charles Jennens. Donald Burrows (1991: 10) states that Jennens 'was emotionally committed to the orthodoxy of the Church of England'. Jennens was a non-juror (one who refused to swear the oath of allegiance to the Hanoverian monarchs), and Lockett (1992: 76) suggests that non-jurors 'compensated for their internal exile by regarding themselves as the bastion of true orthodoxy'. The greatest threat to the orthodox position at the time came from Deism. Ruth Smith (1989: 181) has pointed out that Jennens had a personal reason for his opposition to the Deist position in particular. His younger brother had committed suicide, and following the discovery of

correspondence with another Oxford graduate who was a professed Deist, it was assumed that he had succumbed to doubts about his faith and taken his life in despair.

One of several current websites defines Deism in a way that illuminates its link to *Messiah*: ‘Belief in God as revealed by nature and reason combined with a disbelief in scripture, prophets, superstition and church authority’ (Armstrong, n.d.). Deists rejected the idea of supernatural divine intervention in the world (Luckett, 1992: 77): this entailed a denial of divine revelation in the Bible and of the claim that Christ was divine, in so far as this was understood to be based on a series of miracles. Smith suggests that in *Messiah* Jennens ‘set out precisely those essentials of Christianity that were being attacked’ (1989: 182).

Of particular interest in the present context is Jennens’s use of Old Testament texts. It has often been noted that, for a work that presents the Christian message, there is surprisingly little of the New Testament in *Messiah*. One of Jennens’s intentions is to show that Jesus (miraculously) fulfils Old Testament prophecy, that he is indeed the ‘Messiah’ foretold by the prophets. Smith shows that ‘the texts Jennens uses in his *Messiah* are the bases of attack and defence in scores of contemporary publications about the nature and mission of Christ’ (ibid). His library contained, for example, a book by Richard Kidder, Bishop of Bath and Wells, with the title *Demonstration of the Messias, In which the Truth of the Christian Religion is Proved*. Smith notes that Kidder cites forty-one of the eighty verses making up Jennens’s libretto, and proposes that its list of contents ‘reads like a blueprint for the libretto of *Messiah*’.

It is this feature of *Messiah*’s libretto that would have particularly commended it to anyone opposed to Colenso’s ideas about the Old Testament, which is precisely that aspect of his work that seems to have received the greatest attention amongst the general public (Hinchliff, 1964: 114). Hinchliff suggests that Colenso saw his principal vocation in writing Part I of *Pentateuch and Joshua*, as being ‘to sort truth from fiction’:

It was his duty to lay before the Church at large an account of the course his own inquiry had taken, showing plainly what conclusion he had arrived at and by what steps he had done so. And his conclusion was that the Old Testament, and particularly “the account of the Exodus”, “whatever value it may have, is not historically true”.

(ibid: 91)

That this was regarded as having much wider implications is clear from the charges brought against Colenso at his trial, amongst which were the following:

- V. That he maintained that the Holy Scriptures *contained* the word of God, but are not the word of God;
- VI. That he treated the Holy Scriptures as a merely human book, not inspired by God the Holy Spirit, or inspired only in such a manner as other books may be inspired;
- VII. That he denied the authenticity, genuineness, and truth of certain books of Holy Scripture in whole or in part, and that by this denial he called in question the authority and canonicity of these books in whole or in part.

(ibid: 136)

In other words, to question the historical truth of any part of the Bible was seen as casting doubt on all of it. This was not all:

VIII. That he maintained that Our Blessed Lord was ignorant and in error upon the subject of the authorship and age of the different portions of the Pentateuch, and so denied the doctrine that Our Blessed Lord is God and Man in one person.

(ibid)

Fundamental points at issue in the Deist controversy – divine revelation in the Bible and the divinity of Christ – can thus be seen as central to the charges against Colenso. Rev. Gaster, in his Cape Town lecture, not only illustrates the same progression from the one idea to the other, but also makes the connection with Deism. Referring to the disputed Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuchal books, he says: ‘The first Englishman who discussed and denied their genuineness was Thomas Hobbes, who wrote A.D. 1650, and who was a Deist, and denied the Divinity of Christ as well’ (SACA, 1863i).

It is difficult to imagine a context more conducive to the construction of *Messiah* as a bastion of orthodox Christian faith than Pietermaritzburg in early 1864. Although the actual reviews of the performance do not make the connection explicitly, it would seem all but inevitable that at least some of the listeners would have been able to form, or confirm, such a conception. As Christopher Hogwood points out with reference to mid-nineteenth-century England, by this time ‘public response to Handel’s works, especially *Messiah*, was primarily religious’ (1984: 250). A particular religious controversy, with features not unlike that which had originally determined the selection of Biblical verses for the libretto, was now centred on the Bishop whose throne stood in the cathedral where the performance occurred. Although Colenso was in England, his heresy trial took place at the very time the rehearsals for *Messiah* began (November 1863), and the verdict was delivered barely three weeks before the performance. His antagonist, Dean Green, presided over the performance, and Mrs Green was one of the soloists. The ‘Hallelujah’ Chorus celebrates the victory of Christ over those who oppose his reign. As it filled St Peter’s, could Green and his supporters have failed to identify this with the triumph of orthodoxy over heresy, as represented by themselves on the one hand and Colenso on the other?

How would the heretic himself have reacted to *Messiah*? I have come across one small item of evidence that suggests an answer. In August 1868 Colenso’s wife wrote a letter to Lady Lyell in which she mentioned her son Frank’s ‘passion for music’:

I was surprised the other day at the gravity with which he delivered his sentiments about Handel, and the profaneness of talking about Handel’s music as mere ‘entertainment’, whereas it has been given to improve and raise us altogether. “Why, Frank, what do you know about it?” “Well, we have all *The Messiah*, and parts of other Oratorios”. So we have, but I think not everyone with merely his own fingers and the harmonium, would have made acquaintance with it. Besides, *Papa is rather heretical about Handel, does not appreciate him as he ought*, so Frank does not speak from hearsay.

(quoted in Rees, 1958: 190, italics added)

One wonders whether the basis of this additional heresy on Colenso’s part was the music, the text, or an association of the work with his opponents, formed as a result of the 1864 performance.

PART 2: THE 'ENGLISH' MESSIAH 2

CHAPTER 5: Further performances in the 'big five'

In the decade or so following the first complete performances, *Messiah* continued to appear in the five centres already mentioned (Cape Town, Grahamstown, Durban, Port Elizabeth and Pietermaritzburg), although complete performances remained a rarity.

Pietermaritzburg and Durban

Pietermaritzburg immediately followed its January 1864 performances with two more in August, along much the same lines. It appears from the review (*NW*, 1864d) that some attempt was made to vary the selection of items, notably through the addition of choruses from Parts 2 and 3: of those that were probably not sung in January, the review mentions 'All we like sheep', 'Let all the angels of God', and 'But thanks be to God'. The main difference from the earlier performances seems to have been in the accompaniment. The review says that 'during the whole evening the instrumentalists did their work well and *con amore*', suggesting that the accompaniment was no longer the sole responsibility of the hard-working harmonium player.

There was ongoing rivalry, in all spheres, between Durban and Pietermaritzburg as the two major urban centres in Natal. George Jackson notes how 'it was assumed in Durban that whatever Pietermaritzburg had been able to do in the field of music, Durban could do with equal or greater proficiency' (Jackson, 1970: 55). Although it was to be some years before Durban heard as much of *Messiah* as Pietermaritzburg, excerpts were performed by a choir of similar size (about thirty singers, according to the review) at a concert given in aid of the Durban Benevolent Society in April 1865. The concert was in two parts, the first half consisting of 'selections from the best known oratorios' (*NM*, 1865a), the second of various vocal and instrumental solos and ensembles. The singers were conducted by Mr Ira Hirst, and accompanied on the harmonium by Mr E.A. Platt. Referring to the first half, the reviewer expresses gratification that 'at last Durban had the opportunity of hearing this – the highest and most ennobling – class of music'. Apart from some solo items and a quartet from Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, the only other items mentioned in the review are from *Messiah*, and all are choruses (with, in two cases, the recitatives preceding them): 'And the glory of the Lord', 'For unto us', 'Lift up your heads', 'O thou that tellest', and 'Hallelujah'. These are, in fact, the same five choruses listed in Table 1, which confirms their continuing popularity. 'Hallelujah' concluded the first half, and the reviewer now explicitly confirms the role we have previously noted for it, by stating that it is 'a fit ending for every sacred festival'.

Pietermaritzburg having been first with complete performances, it was Durban that took the first (admittedly small) steps in a development that was crucial for the establishment of *Messiah* as a regular aspect of musical life: the creation of

independent choral societies. Most of the performances so far discussed were given by church choirs or groups brought together for a particular occasion, but in England it was really the large choral societies that made *Messiah* an inescapable feature of the musical landscape. At the end of 1865 the *Natal Mercury* carried the following report:

We believe it is intended, by way of filling up one of the wants of this town, to form a Choral Union – conducted by Mr Barron – on the same principle as those so much in favour in England at the present day, both vocal and instrumental. If successful we may hope soon to hear some of the finer works of our great composers which want of strength has hitherto debarred us from.
(*NM*, 1865b)

It seems probable that this was the same Barron who conducted the first complete performance of *Messiah* in Cape Town in 1863. Jackson (1970: 51) provides the information that he was indeed a military bandmaster (of the Durban Rifle Guard Band) but I have been unable to confirm the link beyond that. In any event, the Durban Choral Union was duly formed and had its first outing on 1 June 1866, with a programme of part songs and solos (*NM*, 1866a). The reviewer compliments the young choir on 'the progress and advancement it has already attained', and says that this ought to be 'a guarantee of ultimate success in the object we understand it has in view, a proficiency in the scientific rendering of music of the highest character'.

Two months later, the Union made a first attempt of this more ambitious kind by presenting a programme of items from *Messiah*. Jackson, in his article on music in Durban for the *South African Music Encyclopedia* (1979: 421), describes this as the first Durban performance of *Messiah* (although he gives the date as 31 May instead of 31 August, apparently confusing it with the Union's earlier performance). In his book he more carefully refers to it in one place as 'the first fairly complete performance' (1970: 18), and in another as 'much abridged' (*ibid*: 51). The advertisement announces 'A Selection from the "Messiah"' (*NM*, 1866b), while the review is headed 'Performance of the "Messiah"' (*NM*, 1866c). The review gives a list of the items sung, which shows that the performance comes close to qualifying as the first complete performance in Durban, although the number of items was considerably fewer than in either Cape Town or Pietermaritzburg (24 out of 53 items, or just less than half).

The reviewer felt that the performance 'fell short of anticipations', the main problem being the size of the choir:

The fact is oratorios require in order to be effectively rendered, a large chorus of voices, much larger than the Choral Union was in a position to supply There was considerable disappointment felt with the comparative feebleness of some of the selections which when sung by a sufficient number of voices, approach more nearly to the sublime than anything else known to human ears.
(*NM*, 1866c)

Here it is clear that the condition of *Messiah*'s 'sublimity' is seen as power in the choral sound. Indeed, this is the essence of the work for this reviewer, since it is the choruses that 'constitute the strength and glory of the *Messiah*'. The reviewer acknowledges that 'the solos were in many cases admirably sung', but without those powerful choruses it seems that the heart of the work is missing. It is primarily through its choruses that *Messiah* as a whole comes to connote not only the 'glory' identified previously (see above: 57), but also strength, which is not far from power.

This in turn opens the way for its association with those who wield power in society, and their glorification, on suitable public occasions, through its supremely powerful music.

Barron died in May 1867 and the Choral Union discontinued practices (Jackson, 1970: 51). However, the enthusiasm for choral music in Durban at this time was such that another choral society had already been formed in 1866: the Sacred Harmonic Society, presumably named after the one which by mid-century had become 'London's foremost choral group' (Smither, 2000: 282). Like the Durban Choral Union (but unlike its English namesake), the Durban Sacred Harmonic Society appears to have been a small group. It was conducted by E.A. Platt, who had played the harmonium in the 1865 concert mentioned above. On Christmas Eve 1866 it presented a programme of pieces 'all connected with the solemn season' (*NM*, 1866d), that included some excerpts from *Messiah*, ending (inevitably) with the 'Hallelujah' Chorus, 'sublimest of Handel's creations'. The report states that there were about seventeen in the choir, but the writer does not complain about lack of power, claiming instead that 'never has sacred music been more beautifully and effectively executed in Natal'. This may have been in part because the concert took place not in a large concert hall but in the 'spacious drawing room' of a private home, attendance being by invitation only.

This choir gave two more concerts of a similar kind in 1867: programmes including a range of sacred music, but always with some selections from *Messiah*. At their concert on 9 July the excerpts were from Part 3, while at their Christmas Eve concert they were from Part 1. In both cases, however, the programme ended with a lone representative from Part 2: yet again, the 'Hallelujah' Chorus. The reports stress the 'improving' nature of the music: 'Seldom in Durban have we had an opportunity of listening to music so elevated in its character, so chastening in its influence' (*NM*, 1867a); 'We cannot too fully recognise the value and the salutary influence of such musical efforts as these, cultivating as they do a taste for the most elevating form of human melody, and associating music with the highest things, and the noblest aspirations' (*NM*, 1867b).

This echoes very clearly the characteristic 'moral' discourse that surrounded music, and especially choral singing, in England during the nineteenth century. It was a primary factor in associating choral singing with 'respectability', which in turn was inseparable from social status. In fact, by the 1860s 'membership of a choral society had become a status symbol, a mark of Victorian respectability' (Smither, 2000: 276). A typical example of such moral discourse is John Ruskin's essay, 'Queen of the Air'. Written in 1869, and therefore roughly contemporary with these South African performances, it claims music as

the first, the simplest, the most effective of all instruments of moral instruction; while in failure and betrayal of its functions, it becomes the subtlest aid of moral degradation. Music is thus in her health the teacher of perfect order, and is the voice of obedience of angels ... In her depravity, she is also the teacher of perfect disorder and disobedience.

(quoted in Stradling & Hughes, 2001 [1993]: 3).

The *Natal Mercury* writer quoted above clearly places Handel on the side of the angels, by stressing *Messiah*'s positive effects and thus its benefit to society. Handel's reputation as 'an unimpeachably moral force' (*ibid*: 5-6) had long been secure in

England, and this meant that *Messiah*'s continual reinsertion into the broader 'moral' discourse was all but inevitable. Its own status and popularity were thereby enhanced, and in turn provided support, and a prime example, for the ideas promoted within the discourse. Already in the mid-eighteenth century, Mrs. Dewes wrote that *Messiah* 'is calculated to raise our devotion, and make us truly sensible of the power of the divine words he has chose beyond any human work that ever yet appeared, and I am sure I may venture to say ever will' (quoted in Dean, 1959: 137). By the time George Hogarth produced his *Musical History* in 1835, he felt able to assert: 'That man must be profligate beyond conception whose mind can entertain gross propensities while the words of inspiration, clothed with the sounds of Handel, are in his ears' (quoted in Smither, 2000: 269).

As can be seen from this, emphasis on the moral element in music was particularly associated with singing, because the music could be combined with 'words of an uplifting and strengthening character' (Banfield, 1981: 14). This was not the only reason why choral singing came to be viewed as 'a moral endeavour and an activity of self-improvement' (Smither, 2000: 276). Links could be drawn between its practices and dominant Victorian values, such as work and self-control, and Grant Olwage has recently drawn attention to specific 'micro-practices of choralism' that favoured its construction in nineteenth-century England as a disciplinary technique (2003: 82ff.). Thus it could also serve admirably as an instrument of social control, drawing the working classes away from the taverns that were regarded as places promoting both drunkenness and the discussion of revolutionary social and political ideas (Smither, 2000: 270). In South Africa, these concerns were activated particularly in the 1930s, when their target was the urban black population, and I shall discuss this more fully in that context (see below: 165).

However, the occupation of leisure time had also become a 'problem' for the Victorian middle classes themselves, many of whom were experiencing it for the first time.

In a society where the gospel of work was so deeply ingrained and its virtues so vigorously extolled, it was perhaps inevitable that leisure time should be regarded with suspicion. If work was a Christian virtue then leisure time was a potential temptation.

(Golby & Purdue, 1984: 91)

In addition to the continual discussion of the subject in the press, preachers devoted much time to it in their sermons. The church consensus seems to have been that 'leisure time could be of value only if it was used either as a complement to work or devoted to activities of an improving nature' (ibid: 144-5). Choral singing was certainly regarded as such an activity, and as we shall see in a moment, when the first choral society was established in Pietermaritzburg in 1868, it was particularly the youth of the community for whom participation was recommended as beneficial. Since for the Victorians 'all arts were viewed in the light of morality' (Russell, 1987: 59), musical and ethical considerations became inseparable. As Dean comments, it was *Messiah* more than any other work that 'provoked most blurring of the line between the consolations of art and those of religion' (1959: 137). By the same token, the existence of a moral discourse surrounding music and musical activity inevitably brought with it a privileged position for *Messiah*, which appeared to embody the requisite virtues more perfectly than any other music.

The Pietermaritzburg Philharmonic Society was considerably larger than its Durban equivalents. Directed by Benjamin Moorby (conductor of the 1864 *Messiah* performances), it numbered some seventy singers at its first public performance in May 1868, presenting 'a pleasing scene, never before witnessed in our city, if we except, perhaps, the Cathedral oratorios' (*NW*, 1868). Here again it may be noticed how performances of *Messiah* are remembered as a series of significant milestones in the life of the community.

At its first performance, the Society presented a programme in two parts, the first consisting of a variety of secular pieces and the second of selections from *Messiah*. The Society included an 'instrumental portion', comprising 'a String Band, with flutes, piano, and harmonium': these presumably provided the accompaniment for the performance. The report gives few details about the performance, but ends by commending the establishment of the Society 'as a means of attracting our youth towards the cultivation of music'. The writer adapts the more general concerns about the use of leisure time (discussed above) to the specific situation of the colony:

There is a peculiar feature in our social system that points to the desirability of our young folks being induced to cultivate the science of music. It is the fact that from the large extent of territory to be filled up, the probability is that many of our colonists will have their lot cast in country places, where the lack of wholesome amusements may, as they probably do now, leave the yearning for excitement to find gratification in grosser occupations.

(*NW*, 1868)

The details given by Jackson and Van der Spuy suggest that, in the later 1860s and through the 70s, both Durban and Pietermaritzburg favoured sacred choral programmes consisting of a mixture of different items, rather than complete performances of any single work. At various times selections from Haydn's *Creation*, Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, Handel's *Judas Maccabaeus* and Mozart's so-called *Twelfth Mass* made important appearances on the programmes, but none could compete for prominence with the ubiquitous *Messiah*. It is, however, to the other three centres that we must turn for complete performances.

Grahamstown

Grahamstown's first complete performance took place on 18 February 1869 (Radloff, 1969: 73). This continued the earlier pattern of marshalling the musical forces available locally for a special performance in aid of a worthy cause, in this case the Albany Hospital. The venue was the Cathedral, and Rev. R.J. Mullins conducted. The advertisement for the performance stated that 'about a hundred and thirty singers, chosen from the different choirs and musical societies of this city, will assist' (*GTJ*, 1869a). A report appearing the day before the performance asserted that 'the effort is, as far as Grahamstown is concerned, unrivalled' (*GTJ*, 1869b), and indeed in terms of the number of singers it would seem that it was unrivalled in any of the other centres at this time. As for the number of items performed, it seems to have been very similar to the Cape Town and Pietermaritzburg performances. The review states that 'fully two-thirds of "The Messiah" were performed' (*GTJ*, 1869c). The solo parts were taken by no less than sixteen different singers, including the conductor and the Dean of the Cathedral, F.H. Williams. As was often the case with these early performances

(when successful), a single outing seemed insufficient once the resources had been gathered together and trained. A week later there was thus a 'Repetition of the Oratorio', this time 'for the benefit of the sufferers by the late fire' (*GTJ*, 1869d): there had recently been devastating fires in the southern region of the Eastern Cape, from Uitenhage through to Knysna.

Most of the review that appeared in the *Grahamstown Journal* is taken up by a detailed consideration of each item. The writer seems to have been well satisfied by the performance, making only two small criticisms. The first is of the choir's singing of 'He trusted in God', where the writer says they were 'not quite so well up to the mark ... having, we infer, bestowed less preparation upon it than on some others'. This may be so, but perhaps the other choruses were better sung not so much because they had received more preparation, as because they were already more familiar. It may be noted that 'He trusted in God' was omitted from the complete performances in Cape Town and Pietermaritzburg, so this was quite possibly the first time it was done in South Africa. All the other choruses receive approval from the writer, and in the case of 'Hallelujah' and 'Worthy is the Lamb' it is stated that 'the parts ... were taken with a precision, accuracy, and power as nearly perfection as possible'. The second criticism concerns the diction of the soloist who sang 'Thou art gone up on high', an item also omitted from the Cape Town and Pietermaritzburg performances.

The opening paragraph of the review discusses the significance of the event for the community, highlighting a number of aspects already noted in relation to other performances: the 'blending together, so agreeably, the interests of a charitable institution with amusement of a truly rational and elevating character', the education of taste (showing 'how high a gratification is connected with this species of musical performance'), and the demonstration of the talent available in the town as a sign of its level of cultural development. What is intriguing about this paragraph is that several of the phrases duplicate exactly the wording of the comments made in the *Natal Mercury* review of the Pietermaritzburg performance (see above: 71). There are three possible explanations for this: it was the same writer, who had subsequently moved to Grahamstown; the *GTJ* writer had read the *Mercury* review; both writers had read something published in an English newspaper or periodical (such as the *Musical Times*) and took that as their model. One slight difference between the two reviews, in an otherwise identical sentence, could lend support to the last possibility. In the *NM* piece the sentence begins: 'It is no slight benefit to have conferred upon a *colonial population*, to have shown them how high a gratification ...', while the *GTJ* has 'It is no slight benefit to confer upon *the public of a provincial town*, to show them how high a gratification ...' (italics added). It seems possible that the *GTJ* writer has copied exactly a phrase appropriate to a performance in an English provincial town, whereas the *NM* writer has adapted the sentence to apply more closely to life in a distant colony. Whatever the explanation, it reinforces the impression that a common discourse, conveying a shared set of ideas, surrounded the 'English' *Messiah* wherever it was found. As Fredric Jameson (amongst many others) argues, texts (in this case, *Messiah*) 'come before us as the always-already-read; we apprehend them through the sedimented layers of previous interpretations' (1981: 9).

Cape Town

The reviewer of the Grahamstown performance discussed above says that in the aria, 'I know that my redeemer liveth', the soloist, Mrs Stier, 'kept everyone in almost breathless attention', but adds that her effort was 'scarcely so well appreciated as it deserved to be' because it came 'so quickly after Miss Hirst's in the same building, a few months since'. The soprano referred to here must be Annette Hirst, a professional singer from England who toured South Africa with the Miranda-Harper Company. These singers were described in one advertisement as 'eminent artistes from the Royal English Opera Houses' (*SACA*, 1868), and were just one of several groups that gave concerts in the main centres. Jackson (1970: 15) names our 'big five' cities as the typical destinations of such touring musicians in the mid-nineteenth century. Towards the end of 1869, a collaboration between the Miranda-Harper Company and local choristers and instrumentalists gave Cape Town its second opportunity to hear a complete *Messiah*, and the first in South Africa with professional soloists.

Lack of adequate soloists had been the primary criticism made of what was probably the next appearance of items from *Messiah* in Cape Town after the complete performance of 1863. J.H. Ashley, whose contributions to that performance were mentioned previously (see above: 60), was in 1864 running the 'Cape of Good Hope Tonic Sol-fa Class', the members of which presented 'A Concert of Sacred Music ... for the benefit of the Cape Town Free Dispensary' on 26 September 1864, 'assisted by several Professional and Amateur Instrumentalists' (*SACA*, 1864a). The programme included a variety of pieces, but the most substantial section consisted of the first part of *Messiah*, plus (to end) the 'Hallelujah' Chorus. The review in the *South African Advertiser and Mail* (*SACA*, 1864b) devotes most of its space to a discussion of two defects, which between them result in the judgement that 'in the present state of Mr. Ashley's corps it was a mistake on his part to attempt the first part of the *Messiah* in a complete form'. The first problem concerns the choir. The writer acknowledges that the 'Hallelujah' Chorus was 'executed in magnificent style' and that the other choruses were in general sung 'with spirit, and in good time and tune – the intonation, as is usual with singers taught on the sol-fa method, was remarkably good'. However, the 'general execution was marked by the defect known among Yorkshire singers by the significant phrase of "the same thickness"', which the reviewer explains as implying 'absence of light and shade, of expression, of finish'. The review continues:

It was, however, in the matter of solo-singing that the great mistake was made. Some of those who sang on Monday evening will, we venture to say, never make solo singers – they have not voice for the work; and others, who are not deficient in this particular, have very much to learn, and unlearn too, before they can creditably sing a solo before an intelligent audience.

(*SACA*, 1864b)

The first South African performances had relied on amateur singers for the solos, many of them drawn from the ranks of the choirs, and the audiences and critics had taken a tolerant attitude towards this, as there was really no alternative. As time went on, however, there was an increasing demand for greater proficiency on the part of the soloists, and eventually an insistence that the best possible performers be found for these roles. The large oratorio choirs remained firmly in the hands of amateurs, in South Africa as in England, and the proficiency of these continued to be a source of

pride for the local community. In terms of soloists, however, it was more often the ability of the promoters to engage the best singers that was important. Indeed, in some cases the presence of 'stars' from elsewhere was seen as adding considerably to the prestige of the event and as an essential drawcard for audiences, though pride could obviously still be taken in a local singer if they too managed to achieve 'star' status. For South African performances, visitors from England, who could claim established reputations there, were clearly at the top of the vocal hierarchy, but South African singers could also ascend the ladder through having performed or studied there.

While these developments lay in the future, the impact made by the professional soloists of the Miranda-Harper Company is clear in the response to their role in the performance of *Messiah* that took place on 4 November 1869. This was the first time they were heard in sacred music, having previously appeared in operatic roles or programmes of secular songs. Despite the title 'Company', it appears that the group consisted of just four members: Annette Hirst (soprano), Winifred Leffler (contralto), David Miranda (tenor) and Henry Harper (baritone). They were thus able to take the solo parts in *Messiah*, but required the participation of local singers and instrumentalists for the choruses and the accompaniment. The advertisement for the event stated that they would be 'kindly assisted on the occasion by a Powerful Band and Chorus' (CA, 1869a). From the list of choristers given in the *Argus* review of the concert (CA, 1869b), it appears that the chorus was small though well balanced: eight sopranos, four altos, six tenors and seven basses, making a total of twenty-five. The orchestra matches almost exactly that of 1863 in terms of strings and woodwinds, though there was less brass on this occasion. The whole performance was conducted by Henry Harper himself, and warranted the presence of 'His Excellency the Governor and several other leading members of society'.

The review is framed in terms of two oppositions: between sacred music and the operatic fare previously presented by the Company, and between the cultural life of Europe and that of the colony. The second opposition is present in the first sentence of the review, which states that the Miranda-Harper Company 'conferred a great boon on the *untravelled* citizens of Cape Town' (CA, 1869b, italics added) by introducing them to the operatic works of composers like Verdi and Bellini. The next sentence introduces the first opposition, by suggesting that the success of these operatic ventures was 'far eclipsed' by the performance of *Messiah*. This is not because the standard of performance was higher, but because oratorio is seen as a higher genre, which necessarily allowed the singers to demonstrate their abilities more fully – a genre worthy of those abilities, one might say. This emerges clearly in the remarks made about Madame Leffler's contribution:

Those who heard that lady at the Mutual [Hall] can form but a slight conception of her singing on Thursday evening. The music and the hall gave her an opportunity such as she never before had in this city of displaying her great powers. With that devotional feeling which must always accompany sacred music to make it properly appreciated, she made many who heard her understand for the first time what sacred music really is, and the emotions to which it gives rise.

(CA, 1869b)

In the last sentence we are back with the second opposition, in its implication that Cape Town has hitherto been out of touch with the cultural life of Europe. The

reviewer constantly signals awareness of the gap between European (specifically English) standards (the result of long experience) and local ones:

Those who have been present at the festivals held in Hereford, Bradford, Norwich, the Crystal Palace, and other places *at home* would of course perceive many deficiencies It is only just to add that at the great musical festivals *in Europe* the persons taking part are perfectly familiar with the score – know every note by heart – and therefore have leisure to devote most of their attention to the conductor. Hence their precision. It was *different* on Thursday night, when their parts must have been almost new to every one but the professional performers.

(ibid, italics added)

At the same time, the opportunity is not lost to suggest that Cape Town can take pride in aspiring towards those standards, and demonstrating that there is a foundation of existing talent on which to build:

For this Colony the performance of Thursday evening was as creditable to the local musicians who formed the orchestra and chorus as it was to the ladies and gentlemen of the Miranda-Harper Company At a very short notice both instrumentalists and vocalists were found who acquitted themselves admirably in the difficult score of the great master of sacred music. We think Cape Town has reason to congratulate itself on the possession of so much musical talent.

(ibid)

For the reviewer, the significance of the Miranda-Harper Company's involvement is that 'the presence and instruction of such accomplished and experienced musicians' is what is required to take the existing talent to a new level, so that Cape Town may 'annually have an oratorio or some similar work performed in its solo as well as subordinate parts by local musicians'. In short, Cape Town's cultural life is to be modelled on that of Europe, which remains the source of standards, the focus of aspiration, and the central point of reference implied by the word 'home'.

The 'Hallelujah' Chorus, again placed at the end, seems to have acted as a summation of all the positive aspects of these various observations. The reviewer deems this 'the best' item of the evening, and describes it as 'truly magnificent'. It incorporated all the musicians, and as the one piece that probably would have been familiar to nearly all of them, it allowed them to demonstrate what was possible and what might be looked forward to on a wider canvas in future years. As always, it simultaneously allowed performers and audience to celebrate what had been achieved on this occasion, while connecting that to an implied deeper spiritual purpose, no less significant for not being made too explicit (and therefore allowing everyone to identify with it in a general way):

Trumpet, drum, wind and string instruments, combined with human voices, pealed through the splendid hall, carrying the great work of Handel's genius not to ear only, but to the heart of every one in the audience. Such a chorus would stir the most insensible, and was worthy of all the praises given by the delighted hearers.

(ibid)

Port Elizabeth

The *South African Music Encyclopedia* article on music in Port Elizabeth does not identify a particular performance of *Messiah* as being the first in the city. Margaret Harradine's wide-ranging 'social chronicle' of Port Elizabeth states that the presentation by the Port Elizabeth Philharmonic Society in 1894 'was the first performance of the popular oratorio here' (1994: 95), but Albert Troskie's (1969) thesis mentions more than one prior to this. The earliest of these took place on 17 December 1875, and while this in itself would not necessarily identify it as the first (since his detailed discussion of music in the city only begins from that year), comments made in the *Port Elizabeth Telegraph* strongly suggest that it was the first. Indeed, the reviewer believes it to be 'the first time in South Africa that this masterpiece of the great composer has been produced in its entirety' (*PET*, 1875b). This is typical of the kind of inflated claim that is made in the absence of specific knowledge to the contrary. That lack of knowledge is not surprising in relation to what might have been going on in other places, but is less likely in relation to local events. The statement's incorrectness regarding South Africa does not disqualify it as evidence regarding Port Elizabeth. The reviewer seems to be familiar with musical life in Port Elizabeth, as is suggested by the following comments:

Hitherto we have been accustomed to consider the rendering of "The Hallelujah Chorus," or the equally difficult one "For unto us a child is born," with a few of the solos, as quite as much as could be expected even from well trained amateurs.

(ibid)

If there had been an earlier performance, people who had attended or participated in it would surely have recalled the fact, even in casual conversation preceding this event.

It is just possible that the reviewer's phrase 'in its entirety', as applied to this performance, is meant in the sense of 'unabridged', in which case the statement is very likely correct, but it would be difficult to establish this in the absence of a complete programme. Certainly the review, and a pre-performance report (*PET*, 1875a) that refers to certain pieces then being rehearsed, name a number of items that are amongst the ones most often cut: 'And he shall purify', 'Unto which of the angels', 'Thou art gone up on high', 'The Lord gave the word' and 'Their sound is gone out'. The review also refers to a duet for alto and tenor, presumably 'O death where is thy sting'. It is unlikely that any of these were performed in the first Cape Town or Pietermaritzburg performances, as Tables 2 and 3 show. It also seems that the performance was a long one: the reviewer says that 'I know that my redeemer liveth' was encored, 'but as it was getting late this was not vouchsafed'. On the other hand, the fact that many items are not named in the review is inconclusive: the reviewer may simply not have mentioned them, or they may not have been performed.

The year before this performance, a choral society had been formed under the auspices of the existing Port Elizabeth Amateur Musical Society (Troskie, 1969: 51). It was directed by Herr C.J.H. Eberlein, a professional musician who had recently arrived in the city and according to *SAME* 'soon established his authority' through a variety of musical activities including performances on the violin and piano, and public lectures (Malan, 1986b: 93). The first work he presented with the choral society was Haydn's *Creation*, but *Messiah* followed soon after.

Although Port Elizabeth was now able to hear a 'complete' *Messiah*, the performance still had considerable limitations. There was no orchestra: Troskie states that three pianos provided the accompaniment (1969: 104), though the *PET* review only mentions the names of two accompanists; apart from this there was only a solo trumpet for 'The Trumpet Shall Sound'. The tenor soloist 'sent word at the last moment that he was unable to sing', and the only option seemed to be for the conductor to replace him. The reviewer is sympathetic, and avoids direct criticism of a man whose qualifications and experience as a musician appear to have been highly regarded, while nevertheless making clear the unsatisfactory result:

This addition to his other duties was too great a task, and his voice not being exactly adapted to the part, which went beyond his natural compass, added to the difficulties he had to encounter. By altering some passages, however, he brought it within his powers; but with his keen artistical feeling he must have reluctantly taken liberties with the grand original.

A similar stance is taken towards the chorus:

The Musical Society, being desirous to perform this oratorio before Christmas, were not able to give it that extended time and practice which they have bestowed upon other similar performances. To this fact may be attributed the somewhat defective rendering of some of the parts.

Overall it was nevertheless judged to be a successful performance, 'one which reflects the highest credit upon all who took part in it', in part because it was the first attempt at a complete performance and in part simply because the music itself was so highly regarded. The pre-performance report not only emphasizes the work's uniqueness but promotes it to quasi-divine status:

It is not an exaggeration to point to the *Messiah* as almost the only work of art in being, which for one hundred years has steadily gone on rising higher and higher in fame, drawing myriads after myriads to wonder and tears – untouched by time, unrivalled by progress: to characterize it as a heritage derived from our fathers, which will go down, by its own intrinsic and increasing value, to our children's children.

(*PET*, 1875a)

It is obvious that this report assumes (and helps to construct) a community of readers that ultimately regards England as 'home', in a spiritual-cultural sense if not a physical one. At one point it refers to England as 'our country'. This identification is presumed to be true not just for the writer but for anyone reading the report, which thereby contributes to the maintenance of such identification. Not only is it taken for granted that the heritage to be passed down is simply that of England, but the report also assimilates Handel to that heritage:

Handel is, perhaps, of all foreign composers the one best known and most appreciated among us; his having spent a large portion of his life in England, and having brought forth his greatest works there, causes us to forget his origin and look upon him as an English composer. He rests in Westminster Abbey among our great men, and we feel as proud of his genius as if the same clime had given birth to the man, and had inspired him with the works which have made him immortal.

The writer now suggests the peculiar Englishness of *Messiah*:

Of all that Handel wrote, the *Messiah* is the most congenial with our sentiments, and holds the highest rank in the minds of every Englishman; in

fact, nowhere has this grand production met with such enthusiasm as in our country It was in England, and in England only, that Handel could have found a great public cradled in reverence for the words or the personages of Holy Writ – yet believing in the Bible as something not to be approached with the indecorum of familiarity.

(ibid)

Much of this is no doubt derived, more or less directly, from what the writer had read in other published sources originating in England. A somewhat later example (Sir George Grove's entry on Handel in *Chambers Encyclopedia* of 1890) gives a good indication of the Victorian consensus: 'There is something expressly English in Handel's characteristics In fact he pre-eminently belongs to England Abroad, he is little known and that mostly as a curiosity' (quoted in Stradling & Hughes, 2001 [1993]: 5). This does not lessen the significance of the presentation of this viewpoint in the context of the Port Elizabeth performance (or performances in other South African towns). If England is 'our country', what then is South Africa? This usage may be lifted directly from an English author, but the writer of this report apparently sees no incongruity in adopting it, nor any need to consider the question just posed. Presumably South Africa is simply an extension of England, or will steadily become so as the heritage of England becomes established. *Messiah* thus appears here, for the first time with this degree of explicitness, as a specifically English work, an essential ingredient of an English heritage. It enables the imagination of a community whose norms allow no dissent: if 'every Englishman' gives highest rank to *Messiah*, it becomes a *necessary* component of an English identity.

CHAPTER 6: Eastern Cape expansion

The Port Elizabeth performance just discussed fell in the middle of a period of roughly twelve years which saw the appearance of *Messiah* in three other places in the Eastern Cape. Queenstown, King William's Town and East London grew into sizable towns somewhat later than Port Elizabeth and Grahamstown, but they, too, had predominantly British populations that soon introduced the customs and culture with which they were familiar.

The early musical life of Queenstown and King William's Town has not been fully documented, so it is not certain when the first excerpts from *Messiah* may have been heard there. The only available research is contained in the *SAME* articles on these towns, and I have simply taken as my starting point the date of the first reference to *Messiah* in each article. On this basis it can at least be said that by 1869 Queenstown had joined the list of towns to have heard something from *Messiah* (Malan, 1986a: 151), and by 1879 King William's Town (Henning, 1984: 93). It is nevertheless entirely possible, even probable, that there had been earlier performances of certain items, since the context of the Queenstown reference is a concert programme that the author has simply selected as being 'typical' of the period, and in the case of King William's Town we know that choral activity had begun much earlier (Thomas Daines was teaching tonic sol-fa courses as early as 1862 (ibid: 98), and he also assisted in training a choir at Holy Trinity Church (ibid: 90)).

Music in East London, beginning from the earliest years, is the subject of a thesis by Widor du Toit (1985), who takes care to mention the performance of works he regards as significant, or of high quality, where his sources (almost exclusively copies of the local newspaper) report them. It is therefore likely that his first reference to the 'Hallelujah' Chorus (ibid: 4), in a concert that took place on 5 January 1881, is the first appearance on record of anything from *Messiah* in East London.

Queenstown

The event that may have introduced Queenstown to *Messiah* was a concert of 'Vocal and Instrumental Music, Sacred and Secular' in aid of 'the fund for the relief of the sufferers by the late fire', the same charitable cause that benefited from the repetition of the complete performance of *Messiah* in Grahamstown a few weeks earlier (*QFP*, 1869a). It was organized by Rev. Henry Dugmore, who was a leading figure in the early musical life of Queenstown (Henning, 1984: 151). An advertisement for the concert that appeared a week before the performance listed the items in the 'probable programme' as including the aria 'He shall feed his flock', and the planned conclusion to the first (sacred) half was 'Halleluia from Messiah – Orchestral'. The very full review of the concert does not mention this latter item, so it may not have been performed. If it was, it would have been played by the small instrumental ensemble consisting mainly of members of Dugmore's family, for which he arranged the music. Whether or not it was actually performed, the intention to do so reinforces the impression already created, not only of its ubiquity as a finale but also of the range of transformations it underwent in order that it could make its regular appearances.

Apart from this the review is interesting for its emphasis on the motif of civic pride, and its detailed description of the solo item from *Messiah*. The reviewer is ‘confident that but few towns in the colony, or even at home, of equal dimensions with our little border town, can make so creditable a show of talent, beauty and fashion, as was displayed on the night of the concert’. ‘Beauty’, being equally applicable to the delights of the ear and of the eye, nicely mediates between them here. Nothing so frivolous as fashion is at play, however, in the discussion of ‘He shall feed his flock’. It was sung by Dugmore’s daughter, Emma, ‘accompanied by the two violins and the violoncello with requisite delicacy and refinement’. For the reviewer this was ‘the piece of the evening’:

It is an exquisite song of joyful assurance and comfort, whose tender strains told great force upon the audience. A death-like stillness prevailed when this sacred melody was sung, and sung too most creditably.

(QFP, 1869b)

Another important strand in the early appreciation of *Messiah* may be introduced here, since this provides a good example of it. Like the particular group of choruses already considered, certain solos for female voice were often singled out, both for attention in the discussion of complete performances, and more literally for performance as excerpts in concerts such as this one in Queenstown. In addition to ‘He shall feed his flock,’ the arias ‘How beautiful are the feet’, ‘I know that my redeemer liveth’ and ‘He was despised’ were often highlighted. Queenstown’s ‘piece of the evening’, ‘He shall feed his flock’, was also the ‘gem of the evening’ at Cape Town’s first complete *Messiah* in 1863 (CA, 1863b), and received the same accolade thirty years later at a performance by the Combined Choral Societies of Cape Town and Suburbs (CA, 1893).

If the choruses were valued primarily for their confident expression of power and glory, these solos seem to have been valued primarily for their quieter expression of assurance or comfort, both of these being words used by the Queenstown reviewer. These qualities are no doubt conveyed partly by the texts, partly by the musical materials (slow tempo, soft dynamic, often a lilting rhythm), but also, it seems likely, by the sound of the female voice itself. It is tempting to suggest that these two groups of pieces represent (at this time) the public/outer and private/inner faces of Victorian religion, as well as the corresponding spheres felt to be appropriate for masculine and feminine activity. (For a description of a choir in which women are characterized by ‘charm’ and the men by ‘vigour’, see below: 108).

The qualities of the music and the qualities required for its performance by the singer are often conflated in reviews, and indeed conform quite closely to qualities comprising a certain Victorian stereotype of femininity: charm, sweetness, loveliness, beauty, tenderness, purity, devotion, pathos. ‘He shall feed his flock’ and ‘How beautiful are the feet’, are most often described in terms of their sweet or charming tenderness. In addition to the passage quoted above, this can be illustrated by the comment of another Queenstown reviewer, from 1883: “‘How Beautiful Are the Feet’ was sung with much pathos and sweetness’ (QFP, 1883b). ‘I know that my redeemer liveth’ is most often associated with purity and devotion. Two examples from Cape Town may be quoted, again widely separated in time: at the first complete performance, one reviewer commented on the ‘purity of feeling’ with which this aria

had been executed (*SACA*, 1863f), while the reviewer of a 1903 performance complains of ‘just that lack of religious devotion about it which adds so much to the beauty of the aria’ (*CT*, 1903).

Like all the ‘Passion’ music from *Messiah*, ‘He was despised’ was less often selected for separate performance. Despite dealing with the pain of the crucifixion, it can nevertheless be understood as an expression of sympathy and comfort for ‘the man of sorrows’ and, by extension, for all who suffer. In discussions of complete performances its connection with the other arias mentioned seems to have been made partly via its ‘beauty’, and partly via the concept of ‘pathos’, already introduced in the comment on ‘How Beautiful Are the Feet’ quoted above (although it must be admitted that this latter word could, depending on circumstances, be applied to a wide range of music, even the ‘Hallelujah’ Chorus: see below: 95). At this point I shall give just two further examples. In the review of the first complete Queenstown performance of *Messiah*, to be discussed below, it is said of the soloist in ‘He shall feed his flock’ that ‘the slight tremor of nervousness rather added to the pathos’ (*QFP*, 1883d). The review of an East London performance from 1896 states that the soloist ‘threw the full *pathos* into the ever-beautiful “He Was Despised,” which must ever class as one of Handel’s very finest efforts of genius’ (*DD*, 1896b, italics added).

In November 1883 *Queenstown Free Press* carried an advertisement for the ‘First Grand Performance in the New Town Hall by the Queenstown Choral Society ... when “The Messiah” will be given for the first time in Queenstown’ (*QFP*, 1883c). The conductor of this first complete performance was W. Coulson Tregarthen, an organist from England who had arrived in Queenstown the previous year to take up a position at the Wesleyan church (Malan, 1986a: 154). The reviewer states that ‘forty-six numbers out of the fifty-seven of which the oratorio consists’ (*QFP*, 1883d) were performed, which amounts to roughly 80% (this is using the numbering in the older editions). Despite ‘a few passages which might have been improved’ the reviewer generally approved the singing of the choir, though the following might be thought a somewhat back-handed compliment: ‘We cannot but admire the patience and ability possessed by Mr. Tregarthen in being able to produce such a result from the raw material which composes most choral societies.’ The performance adopted the practice of using amateur soloists (in total no less than twelve are named), and the reservations in this regard that had been expressed earlier in other centres are echoed here. The reviewer says: ‘Of the solos we cannot speak so well’, though hastening to temper this lack of enthusiasm by mentioning that ‘owing to the late changeable weather many of the soloists were suffering from colds more or less severe’. Nevertheless, this does not quite take the sting out of the comment that ‘amateurs are certainly to be pardoned if they cannot realise our ideas of perfect rendering of this oratorio’.

This first complete performance was prepared and followed by a number of other programmes presented by Tregarthen that included excerpts from *Messiah*, the reviews of which contain comments that throw further light on prevailing practices and attitudes. To celebrate the completion at the Wesleyan Church of what the local newspaper described as ‘one of the finest Organs ever imported into the country’ (*QFP*, 1883a), Tregarthen gave an organ recital on 18 January 1883, which included a number of vocal solos and choral items, the majority being from *Messiah*. This serves to exemplify one type of event which regularly kept the most popular arias and

choruses (and especially ‘Hallelujah’) before the public: the inauguration of a new organ or church building.

The review ends with the following statement:

The “Hallelujah” of the Messiah formed the climax and the triumphant close of a performance that opens a New Musical Era for us; and will lead to the formation of a Sacred Harmonic Society the effect of which will tend to expand, elevate and *purify* the musical taste of Queenstown.

(QFP, 1883b, italics in original)

This makes explicit once again the way ‘Hallelujah’ was seen as a fitting climax to a programme as well as the celebration of the community’s arrival at a new level of cultural achievement (‘a New Musical Era’). It also provides a clear statement of a view commonly expressed at this time, concerning the positive cultural role played by a choral society that would have as its main task the presentation of the kind of music of which *Messiah* was the primary exemplar (for other examples see the next paragraph in this section; above: 82; and below: 96).

In 1885 Tregarthen organized a number of events celebrating the Handel bicentenary. They were clearly constructed in terms of the importance of maintaining and strengthening the link between the cultural life of Queenstown and that of Europe:

The anniversary has been largely celebrated in many of the large cities and towns of England and the continent with signal success, and we trust Queenstown will add its quota of admiration and appreciation of the great composer.

(QFP, 1885a)

The status accorded to Handel in England was sufficient to validate – indeed, to require – a similar recognition in the colony, and the presentation of his music reinforced that status in the colonial community while at the same time establishing the colony’s own cultural credentials. The first event took place on 15 April: unsurprisingly, there are more excerpts from *Messiah* than from any other of Handel’s works. The programme was repeated a month later with a few changes (QFP, 1885b), and another similar programme was given in August (QFP, 1885c). The review of the third programme picks up the theme of progress in musical taste, with oratorio as the summit of aspiration, when it congratulates Tregarthen for his ‘noble work in educating our tastes to a keen appreciation of the highest class of Sacred Music’ (QFP, 1885c).

All three programmes concluded with the ‘Hallelujah’ Chorus. Far from breeding contempt, familiarity seems only to have confirmed the unrivalled position of this piece – indeed, to have promoted it to yet greater heights, to judge from the comments by the reviewer on the third performance:

We will not attempt to describe the mingled pathos and sublimity conveyed to the musical mind by the lofty tones of the matchless “Hallelujah Chorus”. It is beyond the power of the ordinary mind to pourtray [sic]. As the last tones died away, there was a yearning look on the faces of many of the audience for more such soul-inspiring music.

(QFP, 1885c)

It seems likely that the value of this music for this community was only enhanced by their sense that opportunities to hear it were rare. Unlike ‘sublimity’, ‘pathos’ is not a word commonly associated with ‘Hallelujah’, though there are English precedents

(one has been quoted above: see: 31). Perhaps on this occasion it was prompted in part by the same emotion in the listeners that produced the ‘yearning look’, namely, the awareness that their experience of being lifted onto a transcendent plane (something out of the ordinary) was brief and, in the circumstances in which they found themselves, not soon to be recaptured.

King William’s Town

From the time he arrived in 1877, James Hyde took a leading role in the musical activities of King William’s Town. Hyde grew up in Birmingham, where the most significant musical events were the triennial Birmingham Festivals, centred on choral music. He attended some of these concerts as a boy, later taking part in the orchestra as a violinist, and they no doubt had a strong influence on him, as Lily Wolpowitz suggests (1965: 21). This British influence was transmitted to the Eastern Cape when in 1879 Hyde established the King William’s Town Choral Union. Their first concert was announced for 29 August, ‘when will be performed (by desire) a selection from HANDEL’s Oratorio “THE MESSIAH”’ (*KW*, 1879a). This was to constitute the first part of the programme, with the second containing a variety of secular pieces. It seems that for the first half the choruses were selected first, since most of the solo items are the recitatives or arias that directly precede those choruses. This made quite a generous selection of items from Parts 1 and 2. Of the five choruses listed in Table 1, only one is not present among the seven sung on this occasion (‘For unto us’), the additional three being ‘Glory to God’, ‘Behold the Lamb of God’, and ‘Let all the angels’. Accompaniment was provided by piano and harmonium.

The status of *Messiah* is here again confirmed by the reviewer’s supposition that care had been taken to select, for the secular half, ‘pieces which for excellence were not unworthy of being classed with Handel’s *Messiah*’ (*KW*, 1879b). This clearly links to what the reviewer sees as the main objective of the Choral Union, that it should be ‘a most effectual agent in educating the musical taste of the community’, which shows that the view expressed in Queenstown in 1883 was widely held. The reviewer accordingly expresses approval that ‘this music was listened to throughout with the deepest attention’, but regrets ‘the non-observance of custom, time-honoured in England’, namely standing for the ‘Hallelujah’ Chorus (which, it is hardly necessary to say, was the final item of the first half). The reviewer hastens to direct readers onto the correct cultural path, feeling sure it is only necessary to point out ‘the propriety and decorum of observing’ this custom in order ‘to secure its observance’. It does not, in other words, need to be argued for: it can be taken for granted in a way that is only possible when social authority of enormous weight is assumed to lie behind it. Among the elements contributing to that weight are the British monarchy (with which the custom originates), a tradition hallowed by time, England as the source of cultural value, and the present need to demonstrate membership of the social group that sets standards of acceptable behaviour. Observation of the custom represents deference to all these sources of social authority, and thereby sustains their power. That the lesson was well learnt is clear from the following comment on a performance by the Choral Union in 1896 (*DD*, 1896b):

The “Hallelujah” – at the first note of which the audience rose *en masse*, and remained standing to the end, and we noticed the old choral hands amongst the audience could not resist the temptation to join in the chorus – was grand.

The existing sources make no mention of a complete *Messiah* until 1891, although it must be admitted that they are not comprehensive enough to establish with certainty that this was in fact the first such performance. Whether it was or not, Hyde's concert on 2 May does seem to have reached a new level, partly because it drew on the combined resources of King William's Town and East London: '100 Performers!' proclaimed the advertisement (*CM*, 1891a). The solos were distributed between King William's Town and East London amateurs. The previously-noted tension between amateur and professional soloists can be detected in the way the *Mercury* reviewer manages simultaneously to praise and qualify praise of the soloists by saying that 'many of the solos approached very closely to professional excellence' (*CM*, 1891b).

The choruses were sung by the combined King William's Town Choral Union and East London Choral Society. The review singles out the 'powerful richness' achieved in the 'noble' choruses 'Lift Up Your Heads' and 'Hallelujah' and laments that 'probably years will go by before such choruses will again be heard in this town' (*CM*, 1891b). Perhaps it was already known that Hyde was considering a move to Johannesburg, which in fact took place the following year. The gloomy forecast turned out to be accurate, and choral music on a large scale had to await the arrival of another musician 'experienced in the English choral tradition' (Henning, 1984: 94), H.L. Adams.

The accompaniments were played by a small orchestra, somewhat smaller than planned since the band of the Cape Mounted Rifles, which was to have contributed a number of musicians, received orders to move to Bedford. The *Mercury* reviewer felt that 'one little want was the double-bass, and – possibly – a couple of clarionets' but goes on to note that 'it was only because the town happens to possess local musical talent which was willing to be pressed into service at short notice, that there was any orchestra at all' (*CM*, 1891b). The note of civic pride introduced here is considerably (not to say hyperbolically) amplified in the more general remarks with which the review begins:

It is a fact which should be very gratifying to the frontier that nowhere in Africa can the *Messiah* be performed with greater success than it was on Saturday evening. There are skilful soloists elsewhere in Africa and competent chorus singers, possibly a better orchestra than we had, but there is only one Mr. Hyde on this continent and we are fortunate in possessing him for the time being.

(*CM*, 1891b)

The review in the *East London Dispatch* describes Hyde as 'a leader in the production of high-class music' (*DD*, 1891a). Although this phrase need not signify anything to do with social class, the regular use of the same or very similar terms to describe the music and the audience (several examples of which have already been quoted) easily leads to the mapping of the one onto the other: 'high class music for high class listeners', as Bourdieu might say (see the discussion above: 46). Thus the last section of this review moves, with apparent naturalness, from another statement about the music to a series of comments about what amounts to the class composition of the audience. First there is an exhortation to 'all who appreciate really first-class music' to attend the second performance. This is followed by a somewhat patronising commendation of 'the excellent behaviour of the "gods"', that is, the people who

occupied the cheaper seats in the balcony. It is clear that this good behaviour is regarded as unusual, since the reviewer refers to it as ‘a striking feature’. The behaviour of those in the less expensive seats was the subject of comment in many places. A typical example is the following, which concerns a concert in Durban in 1869, at which *Messiah* excerpts had formed the first half: ‘I would allude to the conduct of the occupants of the “back seats,” and would suggest that they might with advantage less closely imitate the manners of those yecept “gods” in the old country’ (NM, 1869a). Here it may be noticed that it was not only standards of performance but conceptions of appropriate behaviour, and the social stratification of performance spaces, that were modelled on prevailing English patterns, and that they remained quite stable in the colonial context throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century. To return to the *Dispatch*, the reviewer having noted that the ‘gods’ were on this occasion ‘conspicuous not so much by their absence as for their good taste’, concludes by stating that ‘the audience was a large and fashionable one’ (DD, 1891a).

With H.L. Adams directing the Choral Union, the late nineties seem to have been the high point for *Messiah* in King William’s Town. Three complete performances were given in the space of two years (1896-7) (Henning, 1984: 95). The first and last of these included distinguished visiting soloists from England (Avon Saxon in 1896, and Mr and Mrs Sims Reeves in 1897), while the second was another large-scale performance involving the Choral Union and the East London Festival Choir. Of this performance, the reviewer noted that ‘the general opinion was that the three grand choruses “Lift Up Your Heads”, “Hallelujah”, and “Worthy is the Lamb,” had never been so splendidly rendered as they were on Saturday night’ (CM, 1897). This kind of statement – that *Messiah* as a whole or specific sections from it had never been better performed in a particular place – appears very frequently throughout the historical record. On some occasions such a statement might indeed have been true (though there is of course no way of assessing this now), but often it seems less likely to have been an ‘objective’ assessment as simply an expression of enthusiasm, a way of registering the impact made by the most recent performance, a wish to convey a felt sense of its significance, and a desire to place it in an ongoing narrative of progress in which the present is appropriately the culmination of earlier developments.

East London

The occasion for the first appearance of *Messiah* in East London was a concert in aid of the local War Relief Fund. The programme was a mixed one, including vocal solos and instrumental items as well as choral pieces. The choir is not named, so may have been called together for the occasion. It sang some ‘glees’ as well as the two substantial sacred pieces that are singled out for special praise by the reviewer: ‘The heavens are telling’ from Haydn’s *Creation*, which began the programme, and ‘Hallelujah’, which ended it. Using again the common phrase able to suggest both the quality of the music and that of the people who appreciate it, the reviewer comments that ‘few had imagined that the evening’s entertainment would be of such a very high class’ (DD, 1881). ‘Hallelujah’ was followed by ‘God Save the Queen’ (as in the Durban concert of 1854 – see above: 52). Their juxtaposition on this occasion would have added a further dimension to the generalized expression of loyalty to the British monarch previously noted, since British forces were at the time engaged in the Anglo-Transvaal War, also known as the First Anglo-Boer War (Saunders & Southey, 2001

[1998]: 10), to which the charitable object of the concert was directly linked. The victory proclaimed in the ‘Hallelujah’ Chorus could hardly have escaped association with hoped-for victory in the current imperial conflict, a point to which we shall return in the context of the second such war (see below: 104 and 134).

Du Toit mentions five concerts over the next decade at which excerpts from *Messiah* appeared. There is a close association between all these occasions and the various churches that had been established in East London, since the concerts either took place in the churches, involved the church choir and/or organist, or were in aid of church funds. These references of course appear amongst references to many other works that were performed, but there is no doubt that it is *Messiah* that appears most frequently. The following table lists all the items recorded as being performed between 1881 and 1891:

Table 4

Date of concert	Items performed	No. in score
5 January 1881	Hallelujah	44
9 May 1882	Overture (organ)	1
	Comfort Ye – Every Valley	2, 3
	And the Glory of the Lord	4
	O Thou that Tellest	9
2 July 1886	Overture (organ)	1
	Comfort Ye – Every Valley	2, 3
	And the Glory of the Lord	4
	But Thou Didst Not Leave	32
	Lift Up Your Heads	33
15 June 1887	O Thou that Tellest	9
8 January 1890	Hallelujah (organ)	44
19 June 1891	And the Glory of the Lord	4

Again there is a close correspondence between this and the items mentioned in Table 1, showing that the same pattern persisted across different times and places. Two items from Table 1 are not present here (‘For unto us’ and ‘I Know that My Redeemer Liveth’), and two of these items are not in Table 1 (the Overture and ‘But Thou Didst Not Leave’): all the remaining items are shared.

East London audiences heard their first complete *Messiah* a week after those in King William’s Town: the King William’s Town performance by combined choirs (already discussed) was repeated in East London on 9 May 1891. The East London Choral Society had been formed in 1882, and James Hyde had become its conductor in 1890, but till this time it had not attempted a full oratorio performance (Du Toit, 1985: 102ff.). The reviewer says that most of the remarks offered on the King William’s Town event ‘may be taken to apply to the performance here’ (DD, 1891b). The main point made in the review concerns the venue. Where earlier reviewers had been concerned about the size of the choir, on this occasion it is the size of the hall that fails to do justice to prevailing conceptions of the scale of *Messiah*: ‘Of course the “Messiah” should always be given in a room of most considerable size. The Mutual Hall is a room of fair proportions, but voices and orchestra, one or the other, or sometimes both, had not proper scope in such a room.’

As in King William's Town, choral activity diminished with the departure of Hyde. East London had to wait five years before *Messiah* was performed again. An article in the *Dispatch* sketches in the background to its reappearance:

Several of our leading musicians are making commendable endeavours to inaugurate what they would like to make an annual musical festival, when [*Messiah*] or similar works more particularly suitable for the Christmas season, may be performed in East London. With such talent as East London undoubtedly possesses this commendable object may reasonably be attained. An influential committee has this year taken up the matter of a Christmas musical festival, and we have pleasure in directing the attention of readers to the announcement in another column of a performance of "The Messiah," which is now being actively rehearsed, and will be given on Saturday next, December 19, in the Mutual Hall.

(*DD*, 1896a)

Messiah's association with the Christmas season had by this time been firmly established in England as well as in South Africa. Part 1, often referred to as 'the Christmas portion', was always the Part that received the least cuts in complete performances, as can be seen clearly from Tables 2 and 3 above. Perhaps the association comes about partly through the simple fact that the items relating to the Christmas season appear at the beginning, creating the first and therefore strongest impression. But it is likely too that the growing significance of Christmas in nineteenth-century England helped to determine the popularity of those items, and through them, of *Messiah* as a work appropriate for performance at Christmas. Just as it was amongst the middle class that *Messiah* achieved its greatest popularity in the nineteenth century, so it was the middle class that adopted Christmas with particular enthusiasm (Golby & Purdue, 1984: 151). They also took seriously the religious significance of the day (Goff-Stoner, 1988: 153), and since Part 1 of *Messiah* concerns just that, it was singularly appropriate for performance at this season. Perhaps its charitable associations also played a role, since the observance of Christmas day often included 'visits of charity to those less fortunate' (*ibid*).

Those in East London who saw themselves as custodians of the tradition of 'high class' music were clearly convinced both that *Messiah* should be regularly performed, and that it was a suitable vehicle for launching the projected annual Christmas festival. The writer of the previously-quoted article laments that although the 1891 performance under Hyde had been 'such a success, the famous oratorio has never since been repeated in East London' (*DD*, 1896a), and goes on to assert that 'all lovers of music will be pleased' to read the announcement of its revival in 1896. This outlook was not, however, universal, as is apparent from comments made by the reviewer of the performance, evidently defending the choice of *Messiah* against those who wanted something lighter:

It was quite right of the promoters to describe the event of Saturday last at the Mutual Hall as the "Musical Festival" of the year. That very many of the public would not regard it in that light, is neither here nor there. It is unfortunately too true that the idea of a musical feast varies most considerably in different minds and so if it did not occur to every mind that the performance of Handel's grand oratorio would be of itself a festival indeed, there is no more to be said about that.

(DD, 1896c)

This suggests a division within the community of taste that has not been apparent before. The promoters of 'high class' taste, represented by the reviewer, cannot assume unanimous acceptance of their opinion regarding a performance of *Messiah*, although they are still able to assume the priority of that opinion, at least amongst people that they would consider to 'matter'. The alternative opinion cannot be ignored entirely, but can still be lightly dismissed as unworthy of serious consideration, and therefore not requiring a considered reply ('neither here nor there', 'no more to be said').

The reviewer immediately goes on to reassert the importance and seriousness of undertaking a *Messiah* performance: 'Seeing the real greatness of the task of the performance of the "Messiah", it ought to be understood that it cannot possibly be approached with a light spirit by any body of amateurs under the sun' (DD, 1896c). The result seems to have satisfied the reviewer, who notes that 'the interest shown in the whole performance was a proper tribute alike to the majestic music and to the performance itself, because it never wavered but gradually increased towards the close'. Both the East London performers and the audience, it seems, had proved themselves worthy of *Messiah*.

CHAPTER 7: Moving North

In the second half of the nineteenth century, British influence in the areas north of the Orange and Vaal Rivers was considerably expanded. Until the 1860s Britain's main concern in the region was 'to ensure the security of its economic interests further south: the control of the Cape sea route and the monopoly of southern Africa's external trade' (Saunders & Southey, 2001 [1998]: 32). Thereafter, however, the discovery of unsuspected mineral wealth gave Britain a new economic interest. With the rapid growth of the British population in Bloemfontein, Kimberley, Pretoria and Johannesburg, it was not long before *Messiah* was being heard in these centres as well.

Bloemfontein

The British had first established a significant presence north of the Orange when the Orange River Sovereignty was annexed in 1848, with the aim of settling territorial disputes between the Boer, Griqua, Tswana and Sotho polities on the Cape's northern frontier (Saunders & Southey, 2001 [1998]: 31). Although Britain withdrew in 1854, finding its commitments too expensive, Bloemfontein, which became the capital of the new republic, retained a predominantly English character. As Karel Schoeman points out in his history of Bloemfontein (1980: 89), the Afrikaners were generally not 'townspeople [dorpsmense]', and so 'they were not inclined to establish themselves here in the years after independence'. Indeed, Schoeman suggests that the town's English character seems for a while to have been strengthened with the establishment of English schools and churches and particularly the advent of an English bishop and his followers.

It was in fact the arrival of Edward Twells in Bloemfontein as its first Anglican bishop in 1863 that resulted in what was probably the first appearance of *Messiah* north of the Orange. The Anglican congregation had no building of its own until 1866, when the new cathedral of St Andrew and St Michael was dedicated. The ceremony on 30 November was preceded by a concert of sacred music in the new building (ibid: 44), apparently the first such concert to have taken place. A varied programme was performed by people from all over the Orange Free State, with the Bishop himself at the piano. Amongst the items was the 'Hallelujah' Chorus. To the extent that Twells was responsible for the performance, *Messiah* was once again found on the side of orthodoxy: Twells had been one of the assessors at Colenso's trial (discussed in Chapter 4 – see above: 76), pronouncing against him, and had subsequently been invited by Dean Green to take a confirmation service in the cathedral at Pietermaritzburg, as a result of which he 'became identified with the Green party' (Hinchliff, 1964: 132; 181-2).

As on so many other similar occasions, 'Hallelujah' would have seemed a singularly appropriate choice: a Christian work of celebration to mark the inauguration of an important Christian building, but also a work by this time associated with a variety of public occasions attended by those who occupied positions of high status. Amongst such persons present on this occasion was President J.H. Brand. According to

Schoeman, Brand requested that ‘Hallelujah’ should be repeated because the sound of a rainstorm on the roof had made it difficult to hear the first time (ibid: 45). This expression of interest by the Afrikaner leader seems symbolically appropriate for the beginning of *Messiah*’s history in a town where, seventy years later, the oratorio would be performed for the first time using an Afrikaans translation of the text. Its history up until that time, however, might be inferred from the order of the toasts at the meal to which two hundred guests sat down in the Bishop’s Lodge after the ceremony: first came the British Queen and royal family, and only then President Brand and the Free State. The establishment of *Messiah* remained firmly British.

According to Japie Human, the first of whose two theses on music in the Free State covers the period from 1850 till the end of the century, the first concert by a choral society in Bloemfontein took place in July 1874 (Human, 1963: 49). The conductor was J. Samuel Barratt, the cathedral organist, and as was so often the case, the Bloemfontein Choral Society decided that music from *Messiah* would provide an appropriate vehicle for its debut. The programme was divided into two parts, with arias and choruses from *Messiah* making up the first part. The pattern of earlier performances was continued here: the review (*Friend*, 1874) mentions all the choruses listed in Table 1, with the exception of ‘O thou that tellest’ and the addition of ‘Glory to God’. The solo items were the recitatives preceding ‘Glory to God’, as well as ‘Comfort Ye – Every Valley’, ‘But thou didst not leave his soul in hell’, and ‘He shall feed his flock’ (‘charmingly and artistically rendered’) paired with ‘Come unto me’ (‘sweetly warbled’). The second half was secular and included a variety of instrumental and vocal items. The concert appears to have been a great success, the reviewer mentioning both the attendance (‘a large and fashionable audience’) and the results achieved (‘Mr Barratt ... must have been most assiduous as conductor to bring the Bloemfontein Choral Society to its present state of perfection’).

Despite *Messiah*’s assistance in getting the choir off to this auspicious start, within a year it had disbanded, and according to Human’s account a series of successors did not fare a great deal better. Only one of these appears to have attempted anything from *Messiah*: another Bloemfontein Choral Society formed in 1880 and conducted by William Barratt, Samuel’s brother, who had already conducted the first complete performance of *Messiah* in Kimberley (see below: 106). The programme for their first concert ended with ‘I know that my Redeemer liveth’ and ‘And the Glory of the Lord’ (*Friend*, 1880).

Although Bloemfontein was the first of the ‘northern’ centres to hear ‘Hallelujah’, it had to wait longer than the others for a complete performance of *Messiah*. This was given by yet another new Bloemfontein Choral Society that appeared in 1901. The organist of the Anglican Cathedral, P.V. King, was appointed as director but he seems never actually to have conducted a performance. At the time of the Society’s formation, the Bloemfontein Orchestral Society was already planning to present *Messiah*, and its director, Ivan Haarburger, conducted the performance on 5 November (Human, 1976: 80-81). The review in the *Bloemfontein Post* (1901d) lists the names of 22 sopranos, 20 altos, 13 tenors and 22 basses (a total of 77), and an orchestra of 13: 1st violins, 2nd violins, and cellos (three each) plus a double bass, an oboe, organ and piano.

The review seems to comment on all the choruses in turn: if those mentioned were indeed the ones performed, the selection corresponds very closely with those sung at the first complete performance in Cape Town in 1863 (see above: 64). This confirms a core of ‘popular’ favourites remaining generally stable across a range of times and places (roughly half of the total number of choruses). The only chorus definitely sung in Cape Town but not in Bloemfontein was ‘Behold the Lamb of God’; the only chorus sung in Bloemfontein but not in Cape Town was ‘Worthy is the Lamb’. The complete set of choruses in each Part is shown below, with those not sung at the Bloemfontein performance in italics:

Table 5

PART 1	PART 2	PART 3
4. And the glory of the Lord	22. <i>Behold the Lamb of God</i>	46. Since by man came death
7. <i>And he shall purify</i>	24. Surely he hath borne our griefs	51. <i>But thanks be to God</i>
9. O thou that tellest	25. <i>And with his stripes</i>	53. Worthy is the Lamb
12. For unto us	26. All we like sheep	
17. Glory to God	28. <i>He trusted in God</i>	
21. <i>His yoke is easy</i>	33. Lift up your heads	
	35. <i>Let all the angels</i>	
	37. <i>The Lord gave the word</i>	
	39. <i>Their sound is gone out</i>	
	44. Hallelujah	

What was unusual about this performance was that there appears to have been only one soloist, the soprano Florence Fraser, whose eminence was recognized by the appellation ‘Free State Nightingale’. She sang all the soprano arias except for ‘If God be for us’ (seldom included except in unabridged performances), as well as a pair that are now generally given to the tenor (‘He was cut off’ and ‘But thou didst not leave’). Perhaps the lack of male soloists in particular was one of the ‘limitations rendered necessary by the exceptional times prevailing’ as the review put it. The performance took place during the (Second) Anglo-Boer War, and was in fact only possible because a degree of stability had returned to the capital since it had been occupied by the British army in March 1900, after which the Free State was proclaimed a British Colony (Saunders & Southey, 2001 [1998]: 128). Although still engaged with the ‘bittereinders’ (those Afrikaners who decided to fight to the ‘bitter end’), the British were by now confident of victory in the war (Giliomee, 2003: 252). In this context the public meaning of the performance could only have been constructed in such a way that Handel lent his support to the British, whatever individual performers or audience members may have felt. To the extent that Handel’s British reputation informed local perceptions, it would have supported this construction. In the *Athlone History of Music in Britain*, Nigel Burton comments that by the beginning of the 19th century ‘Handel’s oratorios were a national institution, evoking strong patriotic feelings (more than ever in time of war)’ (1981: 214). The performance of *Messiah* in Bloemfontein was surrounded by what at this juncture, because of the war, had more than ever before become symbols of British imperialism. The concert took place under the patronage of the Deputy Administrator, whose entrance was marked by the playing of the British National Anthem by the orchestra. It ended with the singing of ‘God Save the King’ by the choir, after which the conductor ‘had to bow his responses to a hearty ovation’. The draping of the performers’ raised platform with flags meant that a

primary symbol of British patriotism was prominently displayed throughout, lending its particular colours to *Messiah*'s triumphant choruses.

This new addition to the accumulation of associations for *Messiah* in South Africa will be discussed in more detail below (see Chapter 9), but the discourse surrounding this performance reaffirms several elements already encountered. *Messiah*'s exalted status was already asserted in a newspaper column on musical matters which appeared at the time the performance was first mooted: it encouraged people to participate in 'this masterpiece of oratorios' (BP, 1901a). The advertisement for the performance calls it an 'Immortal Masterpiece' (BP, 1901b). Several weeks before the performance, there was a column about *Messiah* which constructed its pre-eminence primarily in terms of two other familiar themes, charity and religion: it is 'above every other musical composition' in promoting the cause of charity, 'nor can we doubt that a large amount of religious benefit has accompanied the numberless performances of this oratorio'. It is described as addressing a sermon to the listener, 'scripturally eloquent, awful and pathetic'. The link with British monarchy is reforged by emphasising that Handel enjoyed the friendship and/or admiration of George I, II and III (BP, 1901c). In the review, the success of the performers is held to be 'a credit to Bloemfontein', a measure of the cultural level achieved by its inhabitants. The reviewer felt it worthwhile to report the 'external' validation of this achievement by a member of the Deputy Administrator's party who was not only 'a distinguished musician' but also a member of the British aristocracy: the Marchioness of Tullibardine 'was astonished at the talent displayed and the capable rendering of the work'. The reviewer also constructs the performance as a sign of hope, a first step on the path of progress towards a brighter future, unthinkable without the continued presence of 'immortal' *Messiah*:

It was the first big musical undertaking, and the success achieved satisfies us that when the present unfortunate times are only a memory the grand oratorio can be undertaken with confidence, and interpreted in its entirety.

(BP, 1901d).

Kimberley

Kimberley did not even exist when the 'Hallelujah' Chorus was first heard in Bloemfontein in 1866. By the time excerpts from *Messiah* were sung in Kimberley less than a decade later, it had become the second-largest settlement in southern Africa after Cape Town (Saunders & Southey, 2001 [1998]: 99). This phenomenal growth was the result of the discovery of diamonds in 1869. Although Dutch speakers were prominent in the early days, when the diamond diggings belonged to the Orange Free State, the influx of fortune-seekers soon gave the settlement a more cosmopolitan character, and after the area's annexation by Britain in 1871, English influence became predominant (Scheffler, 1976: 154-5).

Amongst the first musicians to arrive in the new settlement were two people we have already encountered. The Miranda-Harper Company which performed *Messiah* with local musicians in Cape Town in 1869 (see above ...) dissolved in 1870 after performances in Durban. David Miranda and Annette Hirst (who had been married in Cape Town) stayed in Durban, while Henry Harper and his wife Winifred Leffler travelled to Kimberley, arriving towards the end of October 1870 (Bouws, 1982: 165).

They settled there, and initially concentrated on productions of opera (Snyman, 1984: 85). However, on 18 December 1873 the Harper-Leffler Company presented a 'Grand Christmas Festival' at the Mutual Hall, which included several excerpts from *Messiah* (DFA, 1873a).

As in Cape Town, Harper conducted and a choir was formed which consisted of 'forty ladies and gentlemen amateurs, who have kindly given their valuable assistance' (ibid). The first half of the programme was sacred, the second half secular. Most of the first half consisted of solos from various oratorios, including three from *Messiah*. A Mrs Dixon sang 'I know that my Redeemer liveth' and Henry Harper himself sang 'The trumpet shall sound' (DFA, 1873c). The reviewer seems to have been most impressed by the singing of Winifred Leffler, who on this occasion contributed 'But who may abide – For he is like a refiner's fire'. As in Cape Town, her reputation is enhanced by the opportunity to hear her 'for the first time on the Fields in music of this class':

We had frequently heard this accomplished artiste in secular music, both here and elsewhere, and have repeatedly had the pleasure of speaking in very high terms of her performances, and had therefore a tolerably good conception of her vocal powers, but we were scarcely prepared for so much devotional feeling, accompanied with such fine, rich notes, as Madame Leffler displayed in the concluding bars of the air.

(ibid)

The performance was given the official stamp of approval through the patronage of the Lieutenant-Governor of Griqualand West, Richard Southey, and Mrs Southey, encouraging attendance on the part of those aspiring to elite status in this community. It was successful enough for a repetition the following week at St James's Hall (DFA, 1873b).

The first complete *Messiah* performance was given in the following year, its continuing association with the elite confirmed by the same patronage and the same formulaic statement that had appeared in the review of the 1873 performance: 'The hall was well filled with a fashionable audience' (DFA, 1874b). (On the same evening, those less concerned to be fashionable might have gone to St James's Hall, where Sidney Colville presented 'Mirth! Music! and Mimicry!', without benefit of patronage (DFA, 1874a).) As in so many other cases, a particular financial need synchronized with the attractive prospect of being able to perform the great work, to provide the motivation for gathering together the necessary group of performers. In this case, a choir of fifty was directed by William Barratt, in aid of St Cyprian's Church. Barratt also provided piano accompaniment, while his brother Samuel, who had conducted the programme of *Messiah* excerpts in Bloemfontein a few months earlier (see above: 103), joined him as accompanist on the harmonium.

'Hitherto high-class music has been sadly neglected on the Fields,' commented the reviewer (DFA, 1874b), thus encouraging performers and audience to feel that they had been part of a significant improvement in the cultural life of the community. At the same time they achieved their objective of raising money for a cause viewed as 'a noble one': 'Those ladies and gentlemen who devoted so much of their time and musical talent with a view to advance that cause have reason to be highly gratified.'

Messiah continued to be regular fare for a succession of choral societies that appeared in Kimberley in subsequent years, the first being the Griqualand West Choral Society which performed it on 2 July 1879, conducted by Samuel Barratt (*DFA*, 1879; Snyman, 1984: 85-87). However, its apotheosis in Kimberley was almost certainly the appearance of the 'Hallelujah' Chorus at the opening of the South African and International Exhibition on 8 September 1892. The exhibition was regarded at the time as 'one of the most ambitious and important undertakings ever staged in Kimberley' (Roberts, 1976: 290). Kimberley's ability successfully to stage not only a South African but an international exhibition was a sign of its stature in the world and a great boost to local pride. In this spirit, the chair of the exhibition's London committee, Sir Charles Mills, stated that one of its important objects was 'to induce visitors to South Africa to go and see one of the wonders of the world – the Diamond Mines of Griqualand West' (quoted in Roberts, 1976: 285).

Strengthening of the ties between colony and metropole was another important aim. Mills explained that it would 'place the exhibitors of this country (England) in direct touch with those who are their customers in South Africa.' Kimberley's mayor, James Lawrence, told a reporter in London that 'people here should know something of our progress' and that 'the fullest information should be given to the English people with regard to Kimberley' (*ibid*: 286). The support of the South African establishment was sought and given to such an extent that Brian Roberts describes the list of patrons as reading 'rather like a South African *Who's Who*' (*ibid*). Its links to the English establishment were personified by Sir Henry Brougham Loch, who was Governor of the Cape Colony and British High Commissioner for South Africa. He reaffirmed his own connection and that of the local community with the ultimate symbol of the establishment's authority, Queen Victoria, by announcing at the opening ceremony that he would be despatching the following cable:

Sir Henry Loch presents his humble duty to the Queen and begs to inform Your Majesty that amidst great demonstrations of loyalty, he has this day, in Your Majesty's name, opened the South African and International Exhibition at Kimberley.

(*DFA*, 1892a).

Given the cluster of associations which we have seen gather round the 'Hallelujah' Chorus in its South African history, it will be clear that no other piece of music could serve better to launch an event of the kind just outlined. It symbolized in its own way the progress of the community and the level of achievement it had reached; it activated a sense of connection to other important occasions and other places where it had been performed, and perhaps especially to England; it celebrated the local establishment who were patrons and took centre stage at this event, and it connected them also to the social and political establishment of England, above all the monarchy.

Feelings of local musical pride contributed to the major controversy that attended the arrangements for the exhibition. The executive committee announced that the music for the exhibition would be supervised by Herr C.J.H. Eberlein, whom we have already met directing the first complete performance of *Messiah* in Port Elizabeth (see above: 89), but was at this time resident in Durban. Local musicians felt that this prestigious responsibility should have been given to someone from Kimberley, or failing that, at least someone from the Cape Colony (Roberts, 1976: 288).

Nevertheless, Eberlein was appointed and seems to have won over at least some of the locals. A 'Historical Sketch of the Exhibition', which appeared in a supplement to the *Diamond Fields Advertiser* the day after the opening ceremony, claimed that 'the manner in which he [Eberlein] has carried out his functions may safely be left to the verdict of the Exhibition Choir ... He is the idol of the soloists, and the Choir would lay down their lives for him' (DFA, 1892b).

The report on the opening ceremony itself, having described the opening of the doors of the Hall and some of the people present, goes on to give a description of the Choir which again shows the way in which all aspects of the proceedings could be seized upon as evidence of Kimberley's stature:

But the cynosure of all eyes, in the galleries and in the Hall, was the Choir. The attire of the lady members was of that ethereal white and blue (white dresses and blue sashes) which is customarily associated with the poet's picture of paradise, and we certainly think that no other town in the Colony could have produced so fair a display of female charms, or of manly vigour and grace as is shown by our excellent Exhibition Choir.

(DFA, 1892a).

There were two choral items. One was a cantata by a local composer, F. Reginald Statham; the other, which concluded the proceedings, was the 'Hallelujah' Chorus. The report describes Statham's cantata as 'sweetly attractive', but it was clearly up to 'Hallelujah' to provide a finale that combined celebration with solemnity, cultural prestige and imperial authority, affording an appropriate aural match for the visual spectacle presented not only by the choir but by the whole ceremony and its setting:

When the final grand notes of the Hallelujah Chorus rang through the hall, courts and corridors, it was no wonder that the hearts of the assemblage were touched to the quick by the massive surroundings, the lovely music, the soul-stirring strains of the band, and the heart-thrilling words of the Governor.

Another observer remarked that it was extraordinary to witness such a magnificent spectacle 'here, some seven hundred miles in the interior of South Africa, and on ground that not a quarter of a century ago was an arid desert' (quoted in Roberts, 1976: 289). In this narrative of imperial progress, the desert had been made to bloom. 'Hallelujah' was here the musical sign of that advance. Nothing besides this superbly solid and confident music could have provided greater assurance to the observer, as well as the local inhabitants themselves, that their place in this previously inhospitable environment was secure, and had indeed been incorporated into the hierarchy of empire. As reward for this service, 'Hallelujah' in its turn could not have been afforded more favourable conditions to establish itself in this new environment than inclusion as the finale to this ceremony.

Pretoria

The first performance of *Messiah* north of the Vaal River took place in Pretoria in 1883. The naming of the town after the Voortrekker leader Andries Pretorius is a sign of its close connection with those whose purpose had been to escape British control. In 1860 Pretoria became the capital of the independent Boer republic of the Transvaal (Saunders & Southey, 2001 [1998]: 137), officially known as the 'Zuid-Afrikaansche

Republiek' (ZAR). In the early days Pretoria had only a small English population, consisting mainly of shopkeepers and their employees (Vermeulen, 1967: 3). This may explain the observation made by Douglas Reid, in his doctoral thesis on music in Transvaal in the nineteenth century, that 'all choral singing up to 1879 appears to have been performed by small groups formed for specific concerts only; no permanent choral society had as yet come into being' (1971: 23). In the existing research on this early period (Malan, 1986c; Reid, 1971; Vermeulen, 1967) there are no references even to excerpts from *Messiah*.

In 1877 Britain annexed the ZAR, and this led to a more pronounced English presence. Not only did many more English families settle in Pretoria, but the upper class of government officials was now English (Vermeulen, 1967: 7). It is therefore not surprising that the formation of the Pretoria Choral Society followed in 1879, and shortly afterwards the St Alban's Choral Union. Partsongs seem to have been the staple fare, to judge from the programme details given by Reid (1971: 24-5). Even this limited activity came to an end in 1880 because of the outbreak of hostilities between Britain and the ZAR. In 1881, after the Battle of Majuba, the Transvaal regained its independence (Saunders & Southey, 2001 [1998]: 158). According to Reid,

the atmosphere which prevailed in Pretoria after the war was one of depression and lethargy and some time passed before any positive musical development materialised amongst the townsfolk.

(1971: 58)

He quotes an item in the *Transvaal Advertiser* of 21 April 1883 which bemoans 'the dearth of amusement that has prevailed for months past'.

It was in this seemingly unpromising situation that a complete performance of *Messiah* suddenly made its appearance. This might recall its somewhat similar emergence 'out of nothing' in Pietermaritzburg twenty years earlier (see above: 70), and in fact the pioneering work was undertaken in both cases by the same person. R.B. Moorby had arrived in Pretoria at the end of 1882 to give lessons in piano, organ, violin and singing, and soon became the conductor of a new choral society, the Pretoria Philharmonic Society (ibid: 59). In just a couple of months he was able to advertise the 'First Performance in Transvaal of Handel's Great Oratorio THE MESSIAH!' (TA, 1883a).

The advertisement listed all items to be performed, amounting to approximately half of the oratorio. This is somewhat less than in Moorby's Pietermaritzburg performance. Perhaps he felt that the programme would be a little short, because, rather curiously, the items from *Messiah* were preceded by a 'Secular' section which consisted of the Overture to *Zampa* and songs performed by three of the *Messiah* soloists. The reviewer felt that this was a mistake:

Three hours is too long for a musical audience to listen attentively, however sublime the subject; and the first part of the concert, with no *Zampa* and a long wait, might have been left out with advantage.

(TA, 1883b)

The review goes to considerable lengths to balance appreciation and encouragement of the local amateurs with awareness that they still had a long way to go. The gap between aspiration and achievement is everywhere apparent, and is implicitly a gap

between 'colony' and 'metropole'. (I use these terms loosely here to refer to the immigrant community and their mother country, with the recognition that they were not strictly, at this point, part of a British colony.) The reviewer, while giving advice on how 'I know that my Redeemer liveth' should be sung, lets it be known that 'within our knowledge we remember Clara Novello, Miss Dolby, Mme. Lemmens Sherrington, Miss Birch and Miss Patton', thereby taking it for granted that these English luminaries should set the standard for local singers, and that English experience should inform critical judgement of South African performances. It is inevitable that the locals should be found wanting, but there is never any doubt that they have embarked on the right path and that any progress along it is worthy of praise. There is no suggestion that they should deviate onto another path, but rather that they should persevere and improve their efforts, the hope always being held out that they will one day reach their projected goal.

The following extracts, with their increasingly convoluted sentences, illustrate the tensions generated in the attempt to reconcile these contradictory impulses:

No praise can be too great for the amateurs, who must have devoted much time to arrive at such a degree of efficiency, but – and, there is a “but;” we have often had reason to notice at our amateur entertainments that there is not really a proper school of music, or rather a proper training in our midst. With most talented professors who turn out most creditable pupils, we must remark that these same professors, clever, talented and sound musicians, do not impart to their pupils the secret of their art, and they appear to us to be chary of raising them to the degree of masters. The pupils are turned out very much in the same way as Birmingham turns out goods for the colonial markets, very showy, brilliant, but without sound bottom, in a word, shoddy! The performance of last Thursday was perfect, with immense faults! but it gave a promise that we hail as “glad tidings” that Mr. Moorby has the steeds in hand, and that in due course, with patience and perseverance, he will shortly sit as *maestro* We should just as soon think of criticising our neighbour at church, when he croaks out his humble hymn of praise, as to criticise the very lovely music that was rendered under Mr. Moorby’s direction with precision, and excellent taste, and we only remember the faults to think of the study and thought that must have been expended to show so few.

Messiah itself becomes in this discourse a sign both of achievement and of lack. The status of *Messiah* bolsters the significance of the achievement. ‘That class of music’ is described by the reviewer as ‘sound and improving’, and it is therefore to the credit of the amateurs that they perform it. However, the familiarity of *Messiah* facilitates comparisons with other performances, which can all too easily become odious (though hardly more so than the comparison of local singers with ‘shoddy’ goods churned out for the colonial market, with its implication that they will be judged acceptable only by such poorly-developed standards of taste as exist in the colony). Only a work as frequently performed as *Messiah* could have called forth the memory of such a series of English singers as are listed by this reviewer. On other occasions, as we have seen, it was the size of the choir, and consequent lack of power, that marked the distance between performances in the colony and remembered performances in the metropole.

As happened elsewhere, this first performance generated sufficient interest to warrant a second performance two days later. *Messiah* thus played its customary role of helping a new choral society to get off to a good start, but subsequent efforts proved unable to sustain the society (also a syndrome we have encountered elsewhere). Its next programme, presented in October, is described by the reviewer as being ‘of a hybrid character’, and drew a smaller audience. The reviewer speculates ‘whether the paucity of the attendance is to be ascribed to the growing scarcity of money, or to the want of appreciation of classical music by the public of Pretoria’ (*TA*, 1883c). To the extent that the latter was a factor, the reviewer offers the following advice:

To make the performances of this Philharmonic Society attractive, some heed must be given to popular sentiment, and also to popular (we are afraid we must say) ignorance of classical music. The public is not to be educated at once into appreciation. Good music is like “caviare to the million;” and the possession to some extent, at least, of a cultivated taste, is necessary in order to enjoy the masterpieces of the great musicians of the past. The programme on Friday evening was a good one, but was unquestionably heavy.

This strongly confirms *Messiah*’s unique ability to appeal both to the taste of those who styled themselves ‘cultivated’ (the ‘caviare’ reference suggests their association with a social, not to say economic, elite) and to ‘popular sentiment’.

Though *Messiah* would undeniably have been seen as one of the ‘masterpieces of the great musicians of the past’, its performance a couple of months earlier elicited no similar comments about lack of popular appreciation. It clearly had an appeal that items from such works as *Judas Maccabaeus* and *Il Trovatore*, performed in the second programme, could not match. Even the couple of choruses from *Messiah* that were included in the second programme now come in for criticism:

The amateurs ... did their best to give force and expression to the grand choruses from the *Messiah*, but it is impossible with such a limited number of voices and such a small band to do justice to them.

While it is possible that the choir was indeed smaller on this occasion, and even that this is a different and less sympathetic reviewer, it also seems possible that on the earlier occasion criticism was deflected by the aura which a performance of the complete work could generate (especially a ‘first’ performance). Here, following a complete performance, the excerpts could easily seem an anti-climax, whereas in other places excerpts could be appreciated as a foretaste of what was to follow, a stage on the path of progress towards an eagerly-anticipated complete performance at some time in the future.

Reid (1971: 61) mentions one more performance by this society (of Haydn’s *Creation*, in June 1884), but thereafter it disbanded. Although it had not established *Messiah* as a regular feature of the cultural landscape, it does seem to have established the principle that any subsequent choral society seeking a successful launch would be wise to opt for *Messiah* as its first presentation. The next such group was the Pretoria Choral Society, which introduced itself to Pretoria with two performances of *Messiah* in March 1896 (*ibid*: 69-70). This group also moved on to Haydn’s *Creation* (in September), but a planned performance of Mendelssohn’s *Hymn of Praise* towards the end of 1896 was postponed because the vocal score failed to arrive. It was replaced with a work for which scores were, of course, readily available: once again, *Messiah* (*ibid*: 71). According to Reid, the resumption of rehearsals for *Hymn of Praise* produced a poor response, and by the end of 1897 this choir too had disbanded.

Its successor, the Pretoria Choral and Orchestral Society, presented *Messiah* at its first concert in January 1903 (Vermeulen, 1967: 90). Following this with Barnett's *Ancient Mariner* and (again) *Creation*, they began to run into financial difficulties, and activities ceased from 1905 to 1910 (ibid: 91-92). The conductor who attempted to revive the society in 1910, A.L. Gunning, departed from the principle established by his predecessors and appears to have paid the price. According to Vermeulen, his choice of Gluck's *Orpheus* led to resignations, and the society once again went into abeyance until after the First World War (ibid: 93).

Johannesburg

Johannesburg was the last of the major cities of South Africa to be established, in 1886, but within ten years it had become the largest of them – indeed, the largest urban place in Africa south of the Sahara (Beavon, 2004: 6). This extraordinary growth (based on the discovery of gold), and the large contingent of British inhabitants, ensured that it took only a couple of years for *Messiah* to be introduced there. Already in the first half of 1889, two choral societies were formed (Reid, 1971: 203). At its first concert on 8 August, the Johannesburg Choral Society under G. Halford Smith presented part-songs by Pinsuti and Mendelssohn alongside a variety of vocal and instrumental solos and ensembles. However, the Johannesburg Musical Society under H.E. Stidolph (organist of St Mary's Anglican Church) immediately set their sights on *Messiah*, beginning rehearsals on 13 May and presenting the performance on 11 September. The reviewer constructs the significance of the event in now-familiar terms, as a milestone in the life of a community that was barely three years old: 'This is the first occasion, so far as we are aware, on which "The Messiah" has been attempted, even in the abridged form in which it was presented last night' (*Star*, 1889). It was still quite a substantial performance: the items specifically mentioned in the review constitute about 60% of the total, and it is quite possible that some others were also performed.

While acknowledging 'the general verdict of those who were present' that 'it was on the whole a very creditable performance', the reviewer suggests that 'it was almost courting failure' to attempt the work with 'so small a chorus and orchestra'. The main criticisms are indeed focused on these two aspects. The 'orchestra' (which consisted of three violins, a cello and a 'clarionette', in addition to organ and piano) is deemed 'too weak and in want of practice to be effective'. The reviewer's comments on the choir suggest a situation that might seem surprisingly contrary to that pertaining in present-day English South Africa, where sopranos always seem to outnumber the other voices by a considerable margin: 'The sopranos were weak but the other voices were fairly strong for so small a chorus, and sang very well'. This can partly be accounted for by the demographics of the new mining town, which had initially attracted a largely male population. Beavon notes that Johannesburg's population remained male-dominated for most of the nineteenth century (Beavon, 2004: 8). Although the contribution of the chorus is viewed as less successful than that of the soloists, nothing seems able to dim the splendour of the 'Hallelujah' Chorus, which the reviewer says was 'grandly sung' and which is described as 'the crowning composition of the whole oratorio', 'the grandest of choruses, which has not been equalled, or even approached, or ever will be' (*Star*, 1889).

The fact that the conductor of the 'other' choir, Halford Smith, played the organ for this performance, suggests a willingness to cooperate which was formalized the following year. It was agreed that the two choirs should join forces to form one large choral society, known as the Johannesburg Choral Union (Reid, 1971: 204). Its first public performance (Barnett's cantata *The Ancient Mariner*) took place in August, and this was followed on 30 December by *Messiah*. A pre-concert report stated that for this event the conductor, Halford Smith, had gathered 'one of the strongest and largest bodies of singers ever brought together on a Transvaal platform' (*Star*, 1890a). The reviewer felt able to make a claim for the performance that would have seemed unsustainable the previous year: 'We doubt if there have been many better performances of oratorio in South Africa' (*Star*, 1890b). Whereas the soloists outshone the chorus in 1889, this year it is the chorus that is judged 'far and away the brightest and best of last night's representation'. Also since the previous performance, an orchestra had been started at the Wanderers' Club (Wolpowitz, 1984a: 12). Halford Smith was able to draw on 'the best members of the Wanderers' Orchestral Society' (*Star*, 1890a) for this performance, considerably enlarging the orchestra so that the reviewer deemed it 'quite strong enough' (*Star*, 1890b).

A similar performance was given exactly a year later, with the added attraction of a 'star' soprano soloist, Virginie Cheron, the 'Natal Nightingale' (*Star*, 1891). Here for the first time an initial complete performance was followed in the two succeeding years by others, suggesting the possibility that this might become an annual feature of musical life in the town. This possibility was indeed realized, but before discussing this further, we must return briefly to Pietermaritzburg, the one other town in South Africa where the beginnings of a tradition of annual performances had appeared a few years earlier (though, in contrast to Johannesburg, this only happened many years after the first complete performance there).

CHAPTER 8: The annual performance phenomenon

The emergence of an annual performance tradition represents *Messiah*'s establishment in a particularly strong form. It is also a phenomenon unique to this work, and was undoubtedly a major factor in producing for it a familiarity amongst performers and audiences unrivalled by any other work from the Western classical tradition. Annual performances began in Handel's own lifetime, with his Lenten oratorio series and the performances at the Foundling Hospital which were closely associated with them (see Lockett, 1992: 159ff). Although Lent was simply the time traditionally favoured for oratorio rather than opera, the structure of *Messiah*'s libretto afforded the possibility of linkages to several seasons of the church's year. This made it easier for *Messiah* performances to become associated with the yearly observance of a particular season. Unsurprisingly, the vast majority of annual performance traditions have attached themselves to the two festivals which have become most prominent in the Christian world, Easter and (especially) Christmas. One of the earliest such traditions in England was that of the Caecilian Society in London, which performed *Messiah* each year on Christmas Eve from 1791 to 1861 (R. M. Myers, 1948: 239). In both Pietermaritzburg and Johannesburg, the performances which represent the first signs of such a tradition in South Africa all took place in the Christmas season.

Pietermaritzburg

On 20 November 1963, the Pietermaritzburg Philharmonic Society presented what was described as its 'centenary' performance of *Messiah* (NW, 1963). If the intention was simply to mark the centenary of the first Pietermaritzburg performance of 1864, it would surely have been more appropriate to celebrate this anniversary the following year. The implication seems rather to have been that this was in fact the hundredth annual performance in a series that began in 1864 and ran without a break up to the present. This was still the conventional wisdom that emerged from informal conversations I had with several Pietermaritzburg choir singers in the late 1990s when I began this research. It enabled people in Pietermaritzburg to claim, with some pride, the longest unbroken tradition of *Messiah* performances in South Africa.

It is therefore with some reluctance that I have to suggest that my home town's claim may rest on a somewhat shaky foundation. Van der Spuy's account of music in early Pietermaritzburg makes no mention of performances between 1864 and the appearance of the first Philharmonic Society in 1868, nor of any performances after that, until 1880. While this does not absolutely prove that it was not performed, it seems highly unlikely that Van der Spuy would have failed to mention any of them, or the existence of such a tradition, when he takes the trouble to note the occasional performance of excerpts, such as the inclusion of 'For unto us' in a Christmas service at St Peter's Cathedral in 1869 (Van der Spuy, 1975: 396). It seems only to have been after the formation of a new Philharmonic Society in 1881 that performances began to appear regularly each year.

The first of these was on 28 December 1882, conducted by J.C. Dunster. The day before the performance a very full discussion of *Messiah* appeared in the *Natal*

Witness, the stated object of which was to enhance the appreciation and therefore the pleasure of the members of the audience, especially those who would be hearing *Messiah* for the first time. We may guess that its praise of *Messiah* was also aimed to persuade people to attend the performance in greater numbers. The article not only describes *Messiah* as ‘the greatest of all oratorios’, but makes the even stronger claim that it holds an unchallenged position as ‘the sublimest treatment of the sublimest theme that ever occupied the heart or mind of man’ (1882c). It also asserts *Messiah*’s universal appeal, its claim to the attention of ‘all ears and all hearts’: ‘The cultured and uncultured, professional musicians as well as the general public, all find unqualified pleasure in listening to it.’

These comments are clearly based on the established English discourse of *Messiah*. There are echoes of specific statements made as early as the time of Handel’s Dublin performances, which had by this time become common currency. Edward Synge, Bishop of Elphin, attended these performances. He gave the following opinion on Handel’s pre-eminence: ‘As Mr Handel in his oratorio’s greatly excels all other Composers I am acquainted with, So in the famous one, called the Messiah he Seems to have excell’d himself’, and went on to single out as a ‘particularly remarkable’ feature of the work the fact that it can ‘please all who have Ears & will hear, learned and unlearn’d’ (quoted in R. Smith, 1995: 34). The *Witness* article established this English discourse in a new situation, so that the Pietermaritzburg audience could come to share with audiences in England not just the experience of the music, but also a way of talking and thinking about it. It became one more way in which the local community could be integrated into the wider one with which it identified, and to that extent strengthen the felt links between colony and metropole.

The unique status of *Messiah* in this community is suggested in a different way by the special arrangements which were made to swell the numbers in the choir for this performance. A general meeting of the Philharmonic Society was held in September for the purpose of deciding on ‘the best means to be taken to augment the chorus for the forthcoming performance of the “Messiah”’ (*NW*, 1882a). A resolution was adopted that ‘the musical public be invited to co-operate in the production of the “Messiah,” that they be admitted at a quarter’s subscription of five shillings, and that they be requested to submit their names to the Conductor’. The report in the *Natal Witness* concludes by noting that ‘already several names have been handed in, so that the new arrangement bids fair to be very successful’. The fact that it is *Messiah* in particular that deserves this special dispensation is underscored by the writer of a report which is preserved in a Philharmonic Society scrapbook for the years 1881 to 1885 (the source unfortunately not being identified). This report appeared at the time when the Society’s plans for the year had just been announced. While wishing that the choir was larger, the writer considers that

an efficient choir of fifty voices is not to be despised, and is capable of giving with good effect such works as are set down for the first and second concerts. Doubtless steps will be taken before the performance of the “Messiah” for considerably increasing the number of vocalists.

(‘The Maritzburg Philharmonic Society’, 1882, archival source)

What might be good enough for the other works would not do for *Messiah*! By the time of the performance, the advertisement could proclaim: ‘Chorus and Orchestra over 100 Performers’ (*NW*, 1882b).

To judge from the review, Dunster's performance appears to have been unusually successful, and this may have been a factor in motivating further performances on a regular basis. Although the comments must, as always, be taken with circumspection, their reliability on this occasion is enhanced by two considerations. Firstly, the reviewer does pay close attention to choir, soloists and orchestra in turn, not simply praising them but giving a detailed account of what they had done to merit the acclaim given to them. Here is an example, referring to 'For unto us':

The subduing of the voices throughout the opening, the gradual swelling of the parts, and the ultimate *forte* outburst on the words "Wonderful! Counsellor!" produced, as was natural, a marked effect. The same attention to the *nuances* was observable in the chorus of angels, "Glory to God," the hush of the phrase "And peace on earth" being excellently expressed both by chorus and orchestra, while there was also to be noted a crispness and precision in the fugal movement "Good will towards men."

(*NW*, 1882d)

Secondly, while reviewers were usually generous in their assessment of amateur efforts and sensitive to the feelings of the local community, this by no means entailed that they would let anything pass. A useful comparison can be made, for example, with the review of what appears to have been the last *Messiah* performance prior to this one, on 10 September 1880, where the orchestra comes in for quite severe censure:

The performance failed just where we should never have anticipated it would – namely, in the orchestra, which was composed chiefly of professionals. The overture, for instance, was played most detestably – the opening bars (*grave*) were felt through, and the repeat marked *p.* was scarcely distinguishable from the first time The attack of the *allegro* was entirely missed from want of decision on the part of the conductor – the band wavered, and the inevitable muddle ensued, which it scarcely got out of in the final *adagio* bars.

(*NW*, 1880)

This makes one more inclined to accept that in 1882 'the overture was capitally executed', and that the orchestra 'displayed a delicacy to which we have not been too often accustomed' (*NW*, 1882d). The review ends by saying that the success of this performance bodes well for the future of oratorio in the city. In the same newspaper, a survey of the past year's musical activities in Pietermaritzburg includes the opinion that 'the Maritzburg public were treated to a performance of this sublime oratorio which has never been surpassed in the Colony' (*NW*, 1882e). This clearly represents the city as being set on a path of progress, its latest musical achievement being enlisted to suggest that in this area at least it has a lead over its coastal rival. The establishment of an annual *Messiah* performance could only serve to consolidate this position.

Dunster's performance appears to have been the first to take place in the Christmas season. This relocation may in itself have prompted the idea that it should form part of the annual celebrations. Van der Spuy (1975: 573ff) reports that 'a second Christmas performance of *Messiah*' did indeed take place exactly a year later. Early in 1884 Dunster resigned, but there was still a *Messiah* performance in December, conducted by Francis Crane. He too left the city in July 1885. Van der Spuy does not mention a performance of *Messiah* that year. John Mitchell investigated this period of the Philharmonic Society's history and published his findings in the Society's newsletter. He confirms that the Society did not perform *Messiah* in 1885, but he discovered that

the choir of the Presbyterian Church ‘included “portions” of the oratorio in the Christmas morning service’ (Mitchell, 1986). To that extent the tradition of the preceding three years was maintained, for Pietermaritzburg if not for the Philharmonic Society. Indeed, it is not impossible that one church choir or another had indeed performed something from *Messiah* every year since 1864 (especially since it was combined church choirs that gave that first complete performance), but this does not really qualify for the appellation ‘annual performance’.

Although the idea of an unbroken series of performances from 1864 therefore turns out to be a myth, there is still a more modest claim that Pietermaritzburg can make. *Messiah* was indeed performed for three years in succession by the same choir, and as far as I have been able to ascertain, this was the first time in South Africa that this had happened. (And of course Pietermaritzburg may still be able to boast a continuous tradition longer than that of any other South African city, but determining this is beyond the scope of this thesis.) The pattern of December *Messiah* performances was re-established in 1886 under the Philharmonic Society’s new conductor, Frank Crossley. If the review is to be believed, this performance reached new heights. The reviewer declared that the chorus ‘sang with a precision and a vigour which we have at least never heard surpassed in the Colony, and it was a significant fact that the most difficult choruses in several cases went best’ (*NW*, 1886). Amongst those items mentioned in the review which many choirs before and since have chosen to avoid, we may note the following: ‘And he shall purify’, ‘His yoke is easy’, ‘He trusted in God’, ‘All we like sheep’, ‘Their sound is gone out’ and ‘Let us break their bonds asunder’. If this was not in fact an unabridged performance, it must certainly have come close to it. Even the comparison with England is not entirely to the colony’s disadvantage:

We are convinced that in very few towns in England of even three times the size could such a chorus be got together As regards the solos, we must honestly confess that at no performance of the “Messiah” in any part of the world for which professional vocalists were not engaged have we heard the solos done better.

In the first half of 1887, Crossley left South Africa and was followed by A. Campbell-Rowland, whose only presentation with the choir was indeed a further performance of *Messiah* on 23 December. According to Van der Spuy (1975: 578), the Philharmonic Society then went into abeyance for two years, with little or no activity. The rudiments of an annual tradition had nevertheless appeared, with the Society’s December performances in 1882, 1883, 1884, 1886 and 1887, the gap in 1885 being filled by the Presbyterian Church choir.

Johannesburg

The first evidence I have been able to find of an annual performance actually being referred to as such comes from Johannesburg in 1894. This shows not just that *Messiah* happened to be performed each year, but that there was a deliberate intention to do so, or at least a clear awareness of this having become a tradition.

The first three performances in Johannesburg (1889, 1890 and 1891) have already been discussed. According to Reid (1971: 206), the Choral Union which gave the

1891 performance declined the following year as a result of an ‘unfortunate’ performance of *Samson* and the formation of a new choral society attached to the Wanderers’ Club. As a result there was no performance of *Messiah* by the Union in December 1892, but the idea of a Christmas *Messiah* was sustained by St Mary’s Anglican Church which presented the ‘Christmas portions’ at the evening service on Christmas Day (*Star*, 1892). Although not in Part 1, ‘Hallelujah’ was obviously considered indispensable, and gets special mention in the *Star*’s report. The statement that ‘the choir was a strong one’ may suggest that this was not simply the church choir but had been augmented for the occasion, possibly by members of the Choral Union. Since the organist of St Mary’s, H.E. Stidolph, had conducted the first Johannesburg *Messiah* and had remained involved as organist in the subsequent performances by the Union, it is possible that this performance maintained quite a strong sense of continuity with those that preceded it, thus helping to crystallize the notion of an annual performance.

Continuity with the performances that followed is suggested by the fact that the one given in December 1893 was conducted by Halford Smith, who had conducted those of 1890 and 1891. Stidolph resumed his role as organist, and it is likely that many of the choristers had also taken part in those earlier performances, though the identity of the choir in 1893 is not entirely clear, since it is not given a name in either the advertisement (*Star*, 1893a) or the review (*Star*, 1893b). This may be because it in fact drew on the membership of more than one existing group. Halford Smith as conductor suggests the involvement of the Choral Union, but the use of the Wanderers’ Club seems unlikely without the involvement of the Wanderers’ Choral Society, which had given its first performance towards the end of 1892 (Wolpowitz, 1965: 128). This latter choir was formed by James Hyde, whom we have previously met introducing *Messiah* to King William’s Town and East London (see above: 96 and 99). Hyde had arrived in Johannesburg earlier in 1892 to take up the conductorship of the Wanderers’ Orchestra and Military Band. After the Choral Society’s performance of *Judas Maccabaeus* in August 1893, a newspaper critic who described it as ‘mediocre’ appealed to

all the good amateurs in the town to rally under his [Hyde’s] baton and so form one first-rate choral society instead of a lot of indifferent ones for the Wanderers have an appropriate hall, the best orchestra and a good conductor.
(quoted in Wolpowitz, 1965: 129)

Perhaps the *Messiah* performance at the end of the year provided the occasion on which to get such a larger group of singers together, with Halford Smith being given the conductor’s role in order to secure the cooperation of the Choral Union membership, or simply in deference to his having assumed this role previously.

The long review of this performance which appeared in the *Star* (1893b) includes an extensive preamble on matters pertinent to the position of a colonial music critic. It begins with a refusal to allow Johannesburg to be relegated to the periphery on the grounds that its audiences ‘do not greatly appreciate classical work’. As evidence against those who had apparently been saying this, the reviewer points to the fact that ‘the spacious Wanderers’ Hall was crowded last night, on the occasion of the performance of *The Messiah*’. Having thus established Johannesburg’s credentials, it can then be drawn more firmly into the imperial circle by a reflection on the fact that as Mr Halford Smith and his helpers were engaged in interpreting Handel’s great work for the benefit of a Johannesburg audience, preparations were in

progress all over Great Britain for performances of the favourite Christmas oratorio.

Their joint participation in *Messiah* is what links colony and metropole. What separates them is the standard and especially the size of the performance. This writer is more careful than the reviewer in Pretoria ten years earlier (see above: 109) to attribute this difference to circumstances beyond the control of the colonists rather than to any inferiority on their part (no 'shoddy goods' here!). Nevertheless, the avowed greatness of *Messiah* is here revealed to be something of a two-edged sword. It reflects credit on those who perform it, but it also lays bare what the colony lacks:

Not only is it necessary, in presenting *The Messiah*, to have the best singers of the day, but a chorus, say, five hundred strong, an orchestra correspondingly large, and an organ such as that at the Albert Hall. We have not, at present, such advantages; but, taking existing conditions into account, this performance of *The Messiah* was excellent.

Like the Pretoria reviewer, this writer feels compelled to give with one hand and take away with the other: 'It would not be accurate to say that it was a worthy interpretation ... but neither was it unworthy.' Here too, a roll-call of international celebrities enforces an awareness of the gap between metropole and colony, but lest it yawn too damagingly wide, immediate steps are taken to throw a bridge across it, however fragile:

There were no Lloyds, no Davieses, no Sterlings, no Santleys, no Folis to hold the audience entranced, but there were good singers nevertheless, who would have given a better account of themselves than they did but for the weather lately experienced – weather more likely to put an end to a vocalist's powers than to develop them.

The colonial situation may be a sign of lack in the first part of the sentence, but it is then able to supply mitigating circumstances for the singers in the form of its extreme and unfavourable climate!

Acknowledging the difficulty of defining 'the critical function as regards an occasion of this kind', the reviewer looks for a general principle which might supply a resolution:

It does appear to be a mistaken view to say that, while accepting the truth that we needs must love the highest when we see it, we are to accept nothing but the highest when we form part of a set of circumstances in which the highest cannot possibly be attained. To take the good the gods give, and to do so thankfully, appears better philosophy.

In the end, Johannesburg's young age is invoked to explain the absence of 'the highest': the reviewer praises the 'promoters and helpers' for 'doing what they can to give to life in Johannesburg some of the attractions which attend life in other and *older communities*' (*Star*, 1893b; italics added).

One of those 'attractions' was undoubtedly an annual performance of *Messiah*, and as if to signal a stage in Johannesburg's growth towards maturity, the reviewer of the performance that took place the following year does indeed begin by describing it as 'the annual performance' (*Star*, 1894d). This time the choir was quite clearly identified as the Wanderers' Choral Society, and James Hyde took over the conducting. The performance was advertised as "'THE MESSIAH" – Christmas Musical Festival' (*Star*, 1894a; 1894b), suggesting both an enlarged scope (two

performances were given, on successive evenings) and a strengthened seasonal association. Plans were also made to present the performance on a much bigger scale than before. If Johannesburg could not muster a choir of sufficient proportions to do justice to *Messiah* (as the 1893 review had proposed), perhaps South Africa as a whole could. On 13 December the *Star* announced that 'over 100 members of the Choral Societies of the chief towns of South Africa will visit Johannesburg to take part in this Festival' (*Star*, 1894a). *Messiah* thus became the occasion for what was, to my knowledge, the first attempt at a collaborative choral effort on a national scale. This ambitious scheme appears not to have been fully realized, however. On 17 December, it was announced that there would be representatives from Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, Grahamstown, King William's Town, Queenstown, Kimberley, and Pretoria (*Star*, 1894b). In other words, singers from the Transvaal and the Cape Colony had been drawn in, but not Natal or the Orange Free State. Nevertheless, a total of '300 Performers' was expected. On 22 December, a notice in the *Star* (1894c) informed members of the Wanderers' Choral Society about the times of the final rehearsals, at which 'it is expected that visitors from the Cape Colony will be present'. The schedule was quite demanding: in preparation for performances on the Thursday and Friday evenings (27 and 28 December), the choirs rehearsed on the Sunday afternoon, the Monday evening, and the Wednesday afternoon – the intervening day (Tuesday) being Christmas Day.

In the end, although the reviewer notes that 'the platform had every inch of its space taken up', the total number of performers was closer to 200 than 300 (*Star*, 1894d), so it is not certain to what extent people had in fact travelled from the other centres. The reviewer does not specifically mention the presence of visitors, but does say that 'in regard to the singing of the chorus, there was hardly anything else to be desired'. The orchestra, on the other hand, comes in for some criticism: 'It did not always do full justice to the soul-stirring music in some of the choruses, and remarkably so in the effecting [sic] Pastoral Symphony'.

The following December the Wanderers' Choral Society maintained the fledgling tradition by once again presenting two performances. Together with the Wanderers' Amateur Orchestral Society and 'Miss CHERON, Soprano! Miss TIMBERMAN, Alto! Mr. SAUNDERS, Tenor! Mr. SAXON, Bass!' (*Star*, 1895a), this was claimed to represent 'the finest combination ever assembled on a South African stage'. Whether it was or not, the reviewer on this occasion remained unimpressed, and in fact reversed the proportions of approval and disapproval usually meted out in relation to such performances: only occasionally is something found that can merit praise (one being the contribution of the orchestra, in contrast to the previous year's review). As a whole, this review (*Star*, 1895b) is notable for the degree to which it was willing to discredit the efforts of the local musicians. This reviewer evidently did not subscribe to the philosophy espoused by the reviewer of 1893, who gave value to local achievement despite the gap that separated it from the standards assumed to prevail in English performances. For the reviewer of the 1895 performance, awareness of this gap all but renders the local effort worthless: indeed, there is a suggestion that since Johannesburg cannot do justice to *Messiah*, it would be better not to perform it at all, since doing so inevitably devalues it. Far from providing evidence of the local community's advancement, as it had so frequently done since 1830, *Messiah's* greatness becomes for this reviewer an acid test which eats away at the community's pretensions:

An oratorio of the magnitude of Handel's *chef d'oeuvre* cannot be done justice to except under conditions at present beyond the reach of Johannesburg To attempt to interpret the *Messiah* with a less force than an orchestra of over 50 and a chorus of 300 is to invite failure.

It is firstly because *Messiah* has been constructed primarily as a work of power that the reviewer feels justified in commenting on 'the inefficiency of the material at hand for a fit and proper representation': 'Colossal grandeur of volume and effect is absolutely essential'. It is tempting to suggest that the absence of this overpowering effect is uncomfortable for the reviewer because it suggests weakness not just in the musical performance but in everything else that may have become articulated with it. If the meaning of *Messiah* is understood, in the image of the 'Hallelujah' Chorus, as conveying the message that 'the Lord God omnipotent reigneth', and that this demonstrates His ability to triumph over all enemies (to 'break them with a rod of iron', as the preceding aria indicates), then a lack of power in the performance will prove damaging indeed. It will undermine the listeners' sense of the great chain of power that extends from God via the British monarch to the Empire to the local community, those who exercise power at each level and those whose sense of their own power derives from their identification with this hierarchy. A performance of appropriate grandeur can convey this ideal image, but one that is (in the words of this reviewer) 'ragged and thin' threatens to reveal the contradiction built into such a hierarchical conception of power: not that it passes seamlessly from one level to the other, but that in fact it depends on and perpetuates radical inequalities in power. The lack of power in the Johannesburg performance thus becomes a sign of its weakness relative to the metropole. The reviewer's own status is rescued by an identification with the metropole and a dissociation from the colony, as we shall see in a moment.

As was suggested in the case of the first Pretoria performance (see above: 110), it is also *Messiah*'s familiarity that undermines the performers, especially the soloists: 'The solo parts have been heard so frequently sung by the best artists that unless they are in extra capable hands the general effect must be cheap, thin and tawdry'. This carries strong echoes of the Pretoria reviewer's comparison of local singers with shoddy goods produced for the colonial market. In that case the primary motive seems to have been to spur the locals on to match the standards of the metropole more closely, but the tone of this review suggests that the primary motive is rather to boost the reviewer's own status by demonstrating familiarity with the quality that is available in the metropole, the colony having to be satisfied with something less than the best, whether local or imported (as in the case of the bass, Avon Saxon, who was Canadian). The distance between metropole and colony is thus paralleled in this review by the distance it constructs between the writer and the musical (and social) life of Johannesburg as a whole. This is done by drawing attention to the inadequacies of both the performers and the audience.

The reviewer's sarcasm finds in the chorus an especially vulnerable target:

The chorus, as individuals, looked particularly nice and clean, but that is more than can be said of their singing. Now and then there was little to cavil at, as in the "Hallelujah Chorus" and "Unto us a Child is born" – the latter a very creditable piece of work. For the rest it was the typical village choir, tea and muffin and struggle.

By comparing the Wanderers' Choral Society to a village choir, the reviewer is suggesting an equivalence between the relationship of provincial England to the metropolis (the chief city) and that of colonial Johannesburg to the metropole (the 'mother country'). The terms of the comparison are not flattering to province or colony, but they do flatter the reviewer who claims the ability to discern the genuine article and is therefore unwilling to be satisfied with a poor imitation.

It is in the barbed comments which the writer directs at the audience that the opposition of 'genuine' and 'fraudulent' becomes explicit:

The large audience contained hundreds of persons who were plainly in evidence solely because it was the proper thing to be there, rather than out of genuine appreciation for the music. These frauds betrayed their presence first by putting on an attitude of rapt attention and carefully watching for the cue to applaud in the right place; later on by taking no pains to conceal the fact that they were insufferably bored with the whole business. But of such are the bulk of the patrons of "fashionable" musical functions.

(*Star*, 1895b)

An earlier discourse of *Messiah* had constructed it as a work of universal appeal, which therefore had a unique ability to create a sense of community between listeners that were styled as the 'educated' and the 'uneducated' (for example, see above: 115). By choosing a different primary distinction, between the real and the fake, this reviewer constructs a division amongst the listeners that is much more difficult to bridge. It depends on a representation of *Messiah* primarily as a work of European high culture, accessible only to those who identify with a metropolitan elite that is also an elite distinguished by its taste.

The reviewer says that 'the audience could not be roused to anything like honest enthusiasm' for the solos. It seems therefore that there was indeed some – perhaps considerable – enthusiasm (and this may serve as a reminder that the performance may have been judged a resounding success by the performers and the general public, despite the negative review). Nevertheless, the reviewer must discount any enthusiasm actually displayed by implying that it is 'dishonest' (that is, once again, *ersatz*), which seems to mean that it derives from reasons other than an independent judgment on the part of each individual concerning the artistic merit of the performance. There is no hesitation in specifying the inauthentic alternative sources of this applause: 'The sisters, cousins, and aunts of the chorus applauded for purely domestic reasons, and the "fashionable" frauds applauded because they thought it the proper thing.' Only individual response is authentic, and then it must be based on 'established' standards of taste and judgement deriving primarily from England. The reviewer scorns the more 'sociable' reasons for singing in a choir (as symbolized by 'tea and muffin') and for attending concerts, but at the same time provides evidence that they motivated large numbers of people who were involved in this performance of *Messiah* (and presumably other performances also). This symbolic action provided a means of affirming family ties through visible support of the singers by 'sisters, cousins and aunts'. It gave those inhabitants of Johannesburg who occupied elite status or aspired to it (the 'fashionable') an opportunity to gather and become a visible community. It offered that community a feeling of connection to the mother country, which could only be strengthened by the awareness that a tradition had now been established in Johannesburg which could maintain that connection into the future.

Failure to applaud would be not only to reject what had been offered but also to threaten all the social benefits which the activity afforded.

Keith Beavon describes Johannesburg as 'an instant city' (2004: 23). The lack of a local history may have made it seem all the more important for the inhabitants to reconnect with a history imported from elsewhere, in the form of English traditions like an annual *Messiah* performance. The same resources that brought about Johannesburg's growth provided the material conditions for such performances to take place. At the same time, they produced a new audience whose elite status was based primarily on very recently acquired wealth. This emergent elite, led by mine owners and managers (Ross, 1999a: 68), would have found events such as the *Messiah* performances an important way of distinguishing themselves from the less attractive aspects of Johannesburg social life, in which drunkenness and prostitution played a prominent role alongside the making of money. William Beinart describes how John X. Merriman, a long-serving Cape politician, regarded Johannesburg with 'a combination of fascination, horror and disdain' (2001 [1994]: 62), and notes that he was not the only one who found 'the struggle for wealth' an unedifying spectacle.

Even if it is an exaggeration to characterize Johannesburg as 'a city whose sole *raison d'être* was an unbridled desire for material wealth' (Beavon, 2004: 23), it does seem possible that the reviewer's evident sense of alienation from the broader Johannesburg community may have its origins in these circumstances, although this is not to rule out the influence of more personal factors. We cannot know whether the reviewer's distaste stems from an aversion to what was perceived as a grossly materialistic milieu, or from an 'aristocratic' wish to reassert socio-cultural distance in circumstances where 'mere' wealth threatened to level all other differences, or from resentment at being excluded on economic grounds from the circles of the 'fashionable', or even from envy of those with stronger social and family ties in the local community. Whatever the cause, the exclusive discourse of this reviewer contrasts strongly with the inclusive discourse employed in most of the previous cases we have considered (however much the latter may in fact have emanated from or supported a social elite).

The performance just discussed took place on 27 December 1895. A second performance was scheduled for New Year's Eve, 31 December, but did not in fact take place. The reason for this was not the reviewer's negative assessment, nor any lack of audience support. Indeed, when the performance was rescheduled for April the following year, it seems clear that public enthusiasm was undimmed: the short review in the *Star* (1896a) reported that 'every corner of the [Wanderers'] Skating Rink, capable of accommodating fully 3,500, was packed'. Commenting that this should allow the organizers to 'more than recoup themselves for the loss entailed by the abandonment' of the earlier performance, the writer provides a clue as to the reason why it was abandoned, by saying that it was 'in consequence of the political events at the beginning of the year'. What were these political events? The reference can only be to the Jameson Raid, which was launched on 29 December 1895 (Saunders, 1994 [1988]: 236) and came to its ignominious end on 2 January. With the support of Cecil Rhodes, then Prime Minister of the Cape, Leander Starr Jameson, Administrator of Mashonaland, had led a force of mounted men to invade the Transvaal from Bechuanaland (Saunders & Southey, 2001 [1998]: 95), with the intention of linking

up with an expected uprising against the government of Paul Kruger by Johannesburg's British inhabitants.

These British inhabitants (who would have constituted most of the performers and audience for *Messiah* performances in Johannesburg), along with other non-Afrikaner whites, were referred to at the time as 'uitlanders' (foreigners). The ZAR's restrictive franchise laws made it difficult for them to acquire citizenship and the vote (Saunders & Southey, 2001 [1998]: 180). A census taken in Johannesburg in 1896 showed that out of a total population of 50907 whites living within three miles of the town centre, only 6205 were in fact citizens of the ZAR (Saunders, 1994 [1988]: 233). After the failure of the Jameson Raid, the British government made the rights of *uitlanders* a key issue in its relations with the ZAR, and ultimately used this as the reason for provoking war. The uitlander status of the British population may have strengthened their motivation to put their familiar cultural traditions on a secure footing. The regular recurrence of the annual *Messiah* performance was no doubt a reassuring sign that they had in fact established themselves in this new environment. To the extent that it built up their sense of belonging to a distinctive and established British community, it could also have intensified their perception that they were being unjustly discriminated against, as well as their conviction that the imperial centre should give them active support. It is even possible that behind the reviewer's pointed references to the distance between colony and metropole is a sense that their position is not in fact as secure as it might be, and that all aspects of their social life (including their ability to present *Messiah* in a manner worthy of it) might be improved if the local community was brought into closer political contact with the mother country. It could be argued that this was indeed what eventually happened, with the Transvaal becoming a British crown colony after the war. In the short term, however, it was the approach of war that brought Johannesburg's first annual *Messiah* tradition to an end.

The Jameson Raid can be held responsible for the initial disruption of this tradition. The transfer of the second *Messiah* performance from December 1895 to April 1896 was probably the reason why the Wanderers' Choral Society decided against another *Messiah* performance in the same year, choosing instead Mendelssohn's *Elijah* as its December presentation (*Star*, 1896b). According to the list of choral performances in Johannesburg provided by Reid (1971: 323-5), there was no Christmas *Messiah* in 1897, though once again a church choir compensated for the gap left by the larger choral society: St Mary's Anglican Church gave a performance in March. A performance in December 1898 by a new group, the Jubilee Choral Society, might have revived the tradition, had it not been for an escalation of the political tensions that had brought about the Jameson Raid. Wolpowitz (1984a: 18) notes a 'steady decline in concert life' from 1897 onwards, and in 1899 a 'gradual exodus of people' from Johannesburg. At the beginning of October, the resident British Commissioner, Sir Cunningham Greene, advised British citizens to leave the city.

Although this (temporarily) ended the series of *Messiah* performances, they had nevertheless taken place in some form every year throughout the decade from 1889 to 1898. *Messiah*'s predominance over all its competitors is clear from an examination of the abovementioned list of choral performances compiled by Reid. Compared with the nine performances of *Messiah* (ten if we include the 1892 St Mary's performance of the 'Christmas portions'), Haydn's *Creation* (its nearest rival) received only four performances, followed by Rossini's *Stabat Mater* with three and *Elijah* with two. It

can safely be said that *Messiah* had become a tradition in South Africa's youngest town, at least in the dominant British community.

Although this tradition had been established more quickly than in any other South African town, the position of Johannesburg's British community itself, in relation to the rest of the British Empire, was (before the war) much less firmly established than that of the British communities in the Cape and Natal. English-speaking South Africans valued the imperial connection (Beinart, 2001 [1994]: 63), and as mentioned above, the British government gave the plight of the *uitlanders* (living under Republican rule) as the primary reason for challenging the ZAR. The causes of the war have been the subject of much scholarly debate, but in a recent assessment Hermann Giliomee (2003: 248) persuasively argues that

outweighing everything else was the fact that the world saw British resolve being tested by the 'Boers' Ultimately the desire to secure the British geopolitical position in South Africa and elsewhere, and with it British honour, made Britain go to war. Chamberlain [Britain's Colonial Secretary] summed up what was at stake: 'the position of Great Britain in South Africa and with it the estimate formed of our power and influence in our colonies and throughout the world.'

With the eventual British victory in the war, the whole of South Africa was integrated, for the first time, into the British Empire. Several of the performances already discussed have suggested an articulation between *Messiah* and the British Empire. To end my discussion of the 'English' *Messiah*, I will consider an occasion which made this link explicit, and which thereby illustrates the other sense in which, at the turn of the century, *Messiah* became established more firmly than ever before. It was not only a question of the frequency of performance, but also of an association with that socio-political establishment, headed (at least symbolically) by the British monarch, which at this time came to dominate not only South Africa but also 'the biggest empire in the world' (Saunders, 1994 [1988]: 241). What so many listeners experienced as uniquely powerful music could support and be supported by this uniquely powerful empire.

CHAPTER 9: The Imperial 'Messiah'

The peace treaty which ended the (Second) Anglo-Boer War was signed on 31 May 1902 (Johnson, 2004: 105). Within less than a month, the British inhabitants of South Africa would be given a splendid opportunity to celebrate their incorporation into the Empire and their loyalty to its symbolic head: the future King Edward VII was to be crowned in Westminster Abbey on 26 June. Coronation festivities were planned throughout the Empire: here I will consider those in the two centres that formed the focus of the previous discussion on the establishment of annual performance traditions.

Both centres included a State Concert in the celebrations. In Johannesburg, a Coronation Celebrations Committee was set up, with James Hyde as Musical Director. On 20 May a notice appeared in the *Star* under the heading 'State Concert Chorus' inviting 'Ladies and Gentlemen who have had experience in Chorus Singing, and who are willing to assist in the above' to send their names to the Secretary (*Star*, 1902a). On the same page was a notice announcing the time and place of the first rehearsal, and naming the three choruses to be rehearsed: the 'Revels Chorus' from MacFarren's *May Day*, the 'Wedding Chorus' from Cowen's *Rose Maiden*, and, of course, the 'Hallelujah' Chorus from Handel's *Messiah* (*Star*, 1902b). The unique status of the latter is once again confirmed by the fact that it is the only choral item in common with the programme planned for Pietermaritzburg, where the Municipal Choir was enlisted to provide the choral items for the State Concert. 'Hallelujah' was the Finale, followed immediately (as so often) by 'God Save the King', and the choir's other contribution was Handel's Coronation Anthem *Zadok the Priest* (*NW*, 1902a).

In fact, neither of these State Concerts actually took place, because two days before the coronation Edward took ill. The coronation itself was postponed, and it was felt to be inappropriate to continue with the festivities under these circumstances. This does not alter the fact that 'Hallelujah' had been given a particular role to play in a specific context, that this had been announced to the public, and that the music had indeed been rehearsed with this context uppermost in the minds of the performers. The cancellation of the performance therefore does not preclude a consideration of the articulation between this music and the coronation. Besides this, in Pietermaritzburg the link was reinforced by a further concert which did take place, because it was the first in the planned series of coronation festivities and therefore preceded the news of Edward's illness. On 21 June, the Municipal Choir and Orchestra, directed by the Borough Organist, A.H. Day, presented a complete performance of *Messiah* in the Town Hall (*NW*, 1902b).

Apart from noting that this performance inaugurated the City Coronation festivities, the review (*NW*, 1902d) says nothing about *Messiah* itself, and provides no comment that allows us to determine how the music may have interacted with its immediate context. The review confines itself to assessing the competence of the various performers. Nevertheless, as with the planned performances of 'Hallelujah', the plain fact of *Messiah*'s deployment in honour of the coronation necessarily creates a connection between them that will gain significance to the extent that the meanings

and associations of the one resonate with those of the other. It is the salience and multiplicity of those resonances that make *Messiah's* articulation with the coronation especially strong. Its appearance in this context would have activated a specific set of meanings from amongst those that we have seen accumulating since this music's first appearance at the Groote Kerk in 1830, and facilitated their extension in specific directions. To see which these were likely to have been, it is necessary to elaborate the meanings and associations that gathered round the coronation for British South Africans. Their dominant public discourse provides abundant material with which to do this.

The coronation afforded an opportunity for British South Africans to affirm their connection to the Empire, at a moment when the possibility of losing this connection had been brought home to them with particular starkness by the War. Indeed, Johannesburg and Pietermaritzburg outdid each other in asserting their special relationship to the Empire and proclaiming their loyalty to it and to the monarch, its symbolic head. Natal was 'culturally the most English of all South Africa's provinces' (Johnson, 2004: 71), and even when I grew up in Pietermaritzburg in the 1960s and 70s the English community still referred to the city, with a mixture of pride and amusement, as 'the last outpost of the British Empire'. At the end of the Anglo-Boer War, however, imperial outposts had never been more numerous, and the pride taken in Natal's Britishness was mixed with relief and gratitude that it had remained within the imperial circle. This is conveyed very clearly by an editorial in the *Natal Witness*, published when Duke of Cornwall (the future George V) visited Pietermaritzburg in 1901, by which time Natal had been secured for Britain, although the war continued in the northern parts of South Africa (Davenport & Saunders, 2000 [1977]: 225):

The heartfelt prayer of all will be, "Thank God, Natal is British!" It might have been otherwise, and today we might have been groaning under an ignorant despotism Natal is, thanks to Heaven and the British Government, a free country, at liberty to select her rulers and representatives, and to settle her own scheme of Government. Let her prove worthy of her blessings.

(*NW*, 1901a)

Another item on the same page (*NW*, 1901b) suggests the strength of the colonists' attachment to Britain, and goes on to offer Natal's claim to special recognition for its loyalty and Britishness:

Though the Briton carries his staunch devotion to the Throne to whatever portion of the globe he makes his home, he carries too that deep-seated love of country which he transmits to his descendants, so that we hear the Colonist whose father perhaps has never seen Britain, talk lovingly of it as "Home" We may without vanity say it is fitting Natal should be the first soil of the Continent upon which they [the Duke and Duchess] set their feet. Loyal from its birth, the little Colony has been true to its traditions, and within its borders are the first battlefields of the contest. In these lie our honoured dead the dead of the South African campaign are the martyrs of British rule in Africa, and consequently the martyrs of Freedom, Civilisation and Progress We have the belief that the Providence that saved our Empire has great things in store for the land for which it was necessary that such sacrifices should be made.

A third item from the same issue of the *Natal Witness* (1901c) locates Natal and its capital in the geographical and temporal spread of Empire conceived as steady progress towards the present state of fulfilment:

Natal may claim to have a special interest for this Prince ... for is she not the first colony that was added to the Empire during the reign of Queen Victoria? ... The country has been reconquered for Britain, at a heavy price; and that same price ... warrants Natal's fealty to England so long as England herself shall endure ... As Britain's hold grew firmer, there crept up from the coast a new order of things ... Today the Duke sees a pleasant English town ... Natal today is a blazoned illustration of what was done in the "spacious times of Great Victoria," when wise councils and a firm hand wrought in unison to the honour of God and the glory of the Empire.

The themes of the dominant public discourse amongst British inhabitants in Johannesburg were very similar. Three editorials in *The Star* at the time of the coronation may be taken as typical. The first appeared on 24 May, which had been celebrated as Queen Victoria's birthday and was to continue in the future as Empire Day. It proposes that 'the present Coronation has a special significance for the people of the Transvaal, as it is the first since their country became a portion of the British Empire' (*Star*, 1902c). This is, in other words, the first opportunity they have had for a large-scale public affirmation of their identification with Britain. (We might note in passing the way the writer's reference to 'the people of the Transvaal' imposes an imaginary unity on a population in which many would have viewed this occasion in a far less positive light.) The editorial recalls 'the great heritage they [Britons] have received from their fathers', and looks forward to a future when the Transvaal would be 'the home of a great, free and, probably, the most essentially British community in South Africa'.

In the second editorial, written after Edward's illness had been announced, the future is posited as redemptive:

For us the Coronation was charged with a deeper meaning than for the older communities of the Empire. It was not only to us the celebration of a new reign; it was also the celebration of the return of peace and of our entry into the Empire which has done so much for us, and in which we shall find rest from all our previous troubles. In the scale of the preparations that has been made for the celebration the community has shown some sense of its significance.

(*Star*, 1902d)

By the time the coronation actually took place (on 9 August) the celebrations had been scaled down, but not the rhetoric:

This colony is the newest of the dominions beyond the seas which acknowledge the sway of His Majesty, and this town the youngest great community in the British Empire. None can surpass in loyalty his subjects here, and for none is loyalty charged with a greater depth of meaning. To us who were for the most part born in the Empire and have subsequently lived beyond the reach of its beneficent laws, who have learnt to experience its justice and freedom by experience of a Government that cared for neither, to whom the sovereignty of King Edward is not merely the fulfilment of a national law, but the reward of struggle and suffering – to us more than to

others it is given to rejoice today and breathe a deeper feeling into the universal prayer of "God Save the King!"

(*Star*, 1902e)

Can it be doubted that this 'deeper feeling' would have infused the experience of singing and listening to *Messiah* as well, especially when (as in Pietermaritzburg) the 'Hallelujah' Chorus was directly juxtaposed with those same words? The elements contributing to this feeling can now be suggested by analyzing the colonists' construction of and response to the coronation, as evidenced in the passages quoted above.

The coronation was above all a celebration, an occasion for rejoicing. For the colonists, two interrelated elements were particularly salient in motivating this rejoicing: their sense of their own identity as British (seeing England as their 'home' or mother country, being true to its traditions and loyal to its monarch), and their sense of their future welfare as dependent on remaining an integral part of the British Empire (whatever specific political arrangement might be arrived at). This future had been secured by victory in a war that had entailed suffering and sacrifice, including lives lost. Continued identification with the Empire would ensure that all this had not been in vain.

The blessings of Empire included freedom, peace, and progress on all fronts, and this encouraged confidence in the future. The Empire represented the highest level of civilization, and its greatness (in which all its members shared) was therefore not simply a matter of its size and power, (although these were certainly at their height and guaranteed the security of those who belonged to it). The Empire was seen as fundamentally good, and therefore as promoting the welfare of all who came under its sway. It could hardly be otherwise if divine providence had intervened on its behalf. The 'honour of God and the glory of the Empire' were inseparable.

If the Empire ultimately derived its authority from God, it did so via the monarch. The coronation legitimated the monarch's symbolic role as head of the State and of the Empire, but the ceremony that formed its innermost core was a religious one. It took place in a religious building and was presided over by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Here I would like to introduce an additional local viewpoint which is of special interest not only because it highlights the new importance given to the colonies in this entire event, but also because it reintroduces, after a gap of nearly forty years, a figure whose role in *Messiah*'s South African history was given a prominent place in my account: none other than James Green, still Dean at the Cathedral as he was when he organized the first complete performance of *Messiah* in Pietermaritzburg in 1864 (see above: 76). The Cathedral was planning to hold a service at the same time as the coronation, its form being similar to that used in Westminster Abbey. According to Green,

This form of service, by being issued by command of the King, and recommended for use, shows both His Majesty's desire that prayers should be said for him throughout the Empire with one voice and with one accord, and also that he regards the British Colonies, not as dependencies, but as integral portions of his great Empire, and, therefore, seeks to be recognised by us as our "undoubted King" as well as by the lords and commoners of England assembled at Westminster. Never before has such an appeal been made to the subjects of the Sovereign, who have left their island home to carry the English

name and English flag to the distant parts of the world; I earnestly, therefore, hope that the Cathedral will be filled full on Thursday, by men of manly and Christian spirits, who with their whole hearts will respond to the King's request that prayers from one end of the Empire to the other should go up to the Throne of God on his behalf, and who, by their loud acclaim of "God save King Edward" will echo back the loud shouts which will ring through the Abbey at Westminster.

(*NW*, 1902c)

One can scarcely imagine a fuller statement of imperial ideology, from the point of view of British colonists in South Africa, being made in such a compact space. Important themes already singled out above are confirmed here, notably the identification with England as 'home', and the significance of the colony's incorporation as an 'integral portion' of a 'great' Empire. What emerges with particular clarity here is this ideology's fusion of Christianity and monarchy. In the previously quoted editorial extracts, God was represented as acting providentially on behalf of the Empire's military forces. Here God's blessing is being invoked on behalf of the monarch who stands at the head of that Empire, but more than that, the correspondence between the language used in relation to the heavenly and earthly realms constructs them as analogues and allows them to provide mutual support for each other. When Green mentions the King of England, the King of heaven stands in the background, as does the throne of England when he mentions the Throne of God. In this connection David Cannadine (2001: 111) quotes the *Daily Mail's* comment, on Jubilee Day 1897, that 'it was fitting that the queen should have gone to pay homage to her God at St Paul's, for in all the world, He was the only "One Being" who was "More Majestic Than She".'

Under God, the monarch stood at the apex of a complex social hierarchy. Cannadine emphasizes hierarchy as a defining characteristic of the way in which the British saw their Empire (*ibid*: 122). While many settlers were undoubtedly glad to have escaped the rigidity of the class system as it operated in England (*ibid*: 137), it remains true that the reaffirmation of British identity and loyalty to the monarch at this time entailed an acceptance, at least in principle, of a hierarchical ordering of society. If Dean Green's mention of 'lords and commoners' reflects one obvious aspect of its manifestation in England, it was most visibly represented in Pietermaritzburg by the man who, according to the *Natal Witness* (1902a), had 'signified his intention of being present' at the State Concert. His name is literally surrounded by status markers: '*His Excellency the Governor Sir Henry McCallum, R.E., K.C.M.G.*' (italics added). Cannadine (2001: 32) argues that Governors

were not only powerful politically: as the direct, personal representatives of the sovereign, they were at the apex of the colonial social hierarchy, they legitimated and completed it, and they linked it directly and personally to the monarch and the mother country. In more senses than one, they literally ordered society.

Despite the inequality intrinsic to this system, it was nevertheless conceived as fundamentally unified. The image of a universal hierarchy provided an overarching framework, an established order within which everyone understood their place. In a memorable formulation, Cannadine suggests that 'hierarchy ... homogenized the heterogeneity of empire' (*ibid*: 85). The furthest corners of the Empire not only had

their place within the overall hierarchy of Empire, but also duplicated within their own borders the hierarchical social structure of England. The ultimate symbol of that unity was, to return us to the present occasion, the monarch. This was one of the important functions that the monarchy had taken on 'as the political power of the British sovereign waned, while the territories of the British empire waxed' (Cannadine, 2001: 101). The first of the *Star* editorials quoted above shows a clear awareness of this:

It was during her [Victoria's] reign that the Empire grew to its present splendid proportions ... that the island which "knew not her own greatness" began dimly to realise it, and that our "Ocean Empire" began to be animated by a common principle of life, informing all its members, and by a common spirit that gave it unity and meaning And it was during the reign of Queen Victoria also ... that the Ancient Monarchy of England, which had seemed to be losing its hold on the affections of the people ... became once more an object of reverence and enthusiasm to all Britons throughout the world, the living symbol of Imperial unity.

(*Star*, 1902c)

The coronation provided an opportunity for the 'reverence and enthusiasm' attaching to that symbol to be given concrete and communal expression, each local event imagining itself part of a worldwide celebration. Such features as the liturgy shared between the Cathedral in Pietermaritzburg and the Abbey at Westminster would have greatly enhanced people's sense of connection to the imperial centre, and of participating in something common to all British people.

The authority of the monarchy, and its ability to legitimate those who now wielded power in its name, could be further enhanced by appeals to ancient tradition. Lending its 'historic lustre' to empire was indeed another function performed by the monarchy in relation to the empire (Cannadine, 2001: 101). That this had been effectively communicated to South Africa is suggested by the *Star*'s reference to 'the Ancient Monarchy of England'. People in newly-established places like Johannesburg could feel themselves to be part of a venerable tradition through their connection to a monarch whose own position depended on descent from past nobility and who was surrounded by symbols claiming the authority of history and tradition. Writing in 1903, J.E.C. Bodley described the coronation of Edward VII as 'an ancient rite' used 'to signalise the modern splendours' of the British Empire (quoted in Hobsbawm, 1983: 282)

If these were the meanings of the coronation for British South Africans, what did *Messiah* afford those who chose to give it a prominent role in the South African celebrations, and how would its meanings have been inflected for those who listened to it in this context? The answers to these questions depend partly on *Messiah*'s formal attributes (its text and its music, including in the case of the music the conventional meanings that had become associated with its formal features), and partly on the connotations that had gathered round it from the time of its first performance, including those of its earlier South African history. This occasion would have reproduced many of its existing associations while making its own particular contribution to them.

The coronation ceremony itself was most obviously a Christian service, drawing attention to the Christian identity of the monarch and the British nation. *Messiah* is

most obviously a Christian work. Indeed, it concerns central themes of the Christian faith far more explicitly than any other Handel oratorio (and this also gives it a significant edge over those two other staples of the nineteenth-century oratorio repertory, *Creation* and *Elijah*). The more specific links between the religious aspects of *Messiah*, the monarchy, and the Empire will be considered in greater detail below. In its broader dimensions, the coronation was essentially an occasion for celebration, and *Messiah* had by this time firmly acquired the character of a celebratory work (see above: 31, 34 and 58). This may initially have been derived from the musical characteristics of its most familiar choruses and the events celebrated by its text (the Messiah's coming, victory over opposing forces and eternal heavenly reign). It was certainly established by its association with innumerable occasions of celebration. I have already noted its celebratory role in the Handel Commemoration of 1784 (see above: 58), where it took pride of place. What was being celebrated on that occasion? Ostensibly, of course, Handel himself; but Weber points out that 'noblemen sponsored the festival in part to glorify themselves' (1992: 224), and that more generally, though it was not planned as such, it became a celebration both of the end of the American War and the 'unification of the British political elites that had been developing over the previous three decades' (ibid: 223). This suggests the way in which, once *Messiah*'s celebratory associations had become established through its performance in a particular context (especially if that context was a prestigious one, as the Handel Commemorations were), those associations could then be extended to an enormous range of civic and national occasions, whether in Britain or in South Africa.

Larsen's related comments about perceptions of the 'Hallelujah' Chorus, already quoted in the context of the first South African performance at the Groote Kerk (see above: 31), are equally relevant here. Separated from its context, 'Hallelujah' had become an expression of 'generalized rejoicing'. While the coronation was constructed everywhere as a joyful occasion, British South Africans (as noted above) saw themselves as having particular reasons for rejoicing and these would undoubtedly have informed their response to the many items in *Messiah* that convey joy. Occasionally the texts do this directly, as in 'Rejoice greatly', where the cause of rejoicing seems remarkably apt in the present context, given the overlap between religious and monarchical language noted above: the text continues, 'behold thy king cometh unto thee'. But more often it is the music, through such features as its major key and rhythmic liveliness, that constructs joy as the appropriate response to whatever the text is explicitly referring to or reflecting upon, as in 'And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed', 'For unto us a child is born', 'Worthy is the Lamb', and many others.

There is nothing comparably 'internal' to the text or music of *Messiah* that could express directly the importance of British identity to the colonists. However, the simple fact of *Messiah*'s prominence in the cultural life of England meant that it could easily come to be seen as representative of that culture, and that a performance in South Africa would inevitably create a sense of connection to 'home'. Of course, in its original context the use of English as the language of Handelian oratorio was one of the features crucial to its success, contrasting with the use of Italian in opera. This clearly facilitated oratorio's association with British nationalism since, as Ruth Smith points out, 'language, then as now, was regarded as a prime index of national identity' (1995: 73). Other aspects of Handel's activity as a composer also contributed to the association of his music with British nationalism. Smith notes that 'from the moment

that Handel first arrived in England, he was involved in producing music for national events' (ibid: 10). These were the foundations on which, as we previously noted, Handel then came to be constructed in the nineteenth century as essentially British, *Messiah* itself to be adopted as an essential component of English identity, and this construction then to be taken up in South Africa (see especially the discussion above: 90). The continuing salience of this idea within the general time-frame of the coronation is witnessed by the first sentence from a review of a performance given by the East London Choral Society in September 1904:

No oratorio has achieved such popularity with British audiences as Handel's "Messiah" Though from the pen of a German musician, it has come to be regarded as a kind of British achievement, a British musical epic.

(DD, 1904).

There was, however, a deeper level at which *Messiah* could be understood to be addressing Britons directly. This depends on the ideology of the British Empire as the God-ordained bringer of 'Freedom, Civilisation and Progress' and the more general perception of the British as a chosen people. Ruth Smith shows that 'the analogy of the biblical Israelite to the present-day Briton' was a commonplace in Handel's time (1995: 214), and specifically traces its presence in the oratorio librettos. While she rightly cautions against imposing anachronistic ideas of missionary endeavour and empire on the librettos themselves (that is, if we seek to understand what they meant in their context of production) (ibid: 243), the eighteenth-century connection between Israelites and Britons did provide the basis for an expanded set of associations in the nineteenth century. For Victorians, as Linda Colley (1992: 368-9) suggests, the very existence of

the massive overseas empire which was the fruit of so much successful warfare represented final and conclusive proof of Great Britain's providential destiny. God had entrusted Britons with empire, they believed, so as to further the worldwide spread of the Gospel and as a testimony to their status as the Protestant Israel Empire corroborated Britain's blessings.

What would *Messiah* offer people who saw themselves in these terms? I would highlight two elements as crucial: the opening of the whole oratorio, and the group of items beginning with the chorus 'Lift up your heads' and culminating with the 'Hallelujah' Chorus. The very first words of the oratorio are addressed to God's people: 'Comfort ye, *my people*, saith your God'. If eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British ideology constructed a widely-accepted equivalence between Israelites and Britons, then these words spoke directly to contemporary British people, and encouraged an understanding of all the rest of the work in accordance with this opening premise. *Messiah* was about their identity, their values, their history. For the British colonists in South Africa, this conception of *Messiah* could only have been seen as receiving confirmation from the first 'content' given to the message of comfort proclaimed by Isaiah to Jerusalem: that 'her warfare is accomplished'. Those who have struggled and suffered (as the editorials quoted above insist the colonists have) will now, in the words of 'He shall feed his flock', 'find rest'.

This brings us to the second element – the sequence leading from 'Lift up your heads' to 'Hallelujah' – and the possibility of constructing it as an analogue of the historical situation that was uppermost in the minds of the colonists. Although several items are often omitted from this section of *Messiah*, there are usually enough to convey the

idea that, after Christ's Ascension, the Gospel goes out into the world and encounters opposition, which is then overcome by God's power. In addition to the two framing choruses, Pietermaritzburg's 1902 performance included the bass aria 'Why do the nations' and the tenor aria 'Thou shalt break them'. The first chorus in the sequence, 'Lift up your heads', represents Christ as 'the King of glory'. The answer to the question, 'Who is the King of glory?' is given as: 'The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle.' If God is mighty in battle, and is on our side (because we are God's people), then victory over our enemies must follow. The victory of the British in the war just concluded can thus be taken as evidence both of God's power and of the rightness of their cause. The immediate historical context would have enabled the chorus to sing their repeated affirmation 'He is the King of glory' with greatly increased conviction, and the listeners to respond with matching enthusiasm. The idea of warfare is developed in 'Why do the nations so furiously rage together?' Its concluding text explicitly locates the causes of this warfare in opposition to God: 'The kings of the earth rise up, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord, and his Anointed'. If we (the British) are God's people, it becomes possible to see this text as referring to our opponents (the Boers). The following recitative and aria announce their fate: 'He that dwelleth in heaven shall laugh them to scorn ... Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron.' And what follows? 'Hallelujah.'

Given its position in the oratorio, and the historical context, it becomes difficult to imagine this chorus of triumph being understood in any way other than as a celebration of the victory that has secured the British colonists their place in the Empire. Now 'the Lord God omnipotent reigneth' – and so too, of course, do his earthly representatives (a point to which I shall return below). 'The kingdom of this world' – the realm in which, formerly, the opposing forces had arisen – 'is become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ'. *Messiah* not only expresses a pre-existing understanding of the relationship between God and Empire, but actively reinforces it and perhaps, for some listeners, produces it for the first time.

The musical materials are crucial in expressing and producing the emotions appropriate to this understanding, and thereby giving people a felt experience of what it means to be a favoured people: joy, excitement, exhilaration, confidence, security, power. Many of the salient musical elements of 'Hallelujah' have been identified at various points in preceding discussions. It is not only in a major key, conventionally associated with happiness, but places unusual emphasis on the three primary triads, which are of course also major, resulting in an overwhelmingly 'major' sound throughout. Excitement is suggested especially by the repetition of the word 'Hallelujah' using a rhythm consisting of two semiquavers followed by two quavers, either tossed from one voice to another in contrapuntal textures (as in the passage beginning at bar 22) or hammered out homophonically (as in bars 14-16). As the shortest note-values used, the semiquavers create an impression of liveliness and animation, and the repetitions of the rhythm (separated by quaver rests) become almost breathless, and build up a tremendous momentum before the final cadence. It is partly this which creates the feeling of exhilaration, but also the treatment of the words 'King of Kings and Lord of Lords' in a series of steps rising steadily higher and higher (between bars 57 and 67), transcending momentarily the otherwise stable tonality. Indeed, the clear statement and frequent reassertion of the basic tonal functions in D major is one of the aspects of the music accounting for the impression of confidence and security. The combination of a steady, march-like beat and a

regular phrase structure punctuated by frequent cadences creates a strong sense of both forward momentum and predictability (the music leading inevitably towards the cadential resolution). What could be more reassuring (or final) than the extraordinarily emphatic plagal cadence at the end? Its ending is one of several features which 'Hallelujah' shares with 'Lift up your heads', which begins even more emphatically in the style of a march. This music allowed the British colonists of 1902 to feel that they could move with confidence into an assured future (indeed, one that would be there 'for ever and ever'). More than that, they could experience that confidence already through their participation in the music.

What guarantees the future is, ultimately, the power of the Empire. In the immediate past this had been demonstrated most directly in military terms. *Messiah* is much less explicitly about war than some other Handel oratorios (notably *Judas Maccabaeus* and *Joshua*), but as suggested above the emphasis of its most famous chorus on victory over God's enemies made it possible to appropriate it on behalf of the victorious British. The orchestration of 'Hallelujah' includes two instruments with military associations (trumpets and drums) and the expanded orchestrations of the Victorian period allowed scope for participation by more instruments from the military band, in the South African context frequently played by personnel from regiments based in the vicinity. In Pietermaritzburg, for example, the advertisement for the *Messiah* performance indicated that the trumpet obbligato in 'The trumpet shall sound' would be played by 'Sergt. Loader'. The aria is about the raising of the dead at the last judgement, but given the framework of ideas outlined above it can easily sound like a rousing military call to arms, the sort of vigorous, 'manly' music that Handel was felt by his contemporaries to be uniquely able to produce (R. Smith, 1995: 77; 168). According to Ruth Smith, many contemporary writers 'registered Handel's oratorios as having exceptional volume of sound and hence being uniquely invigorating' (ibid: 77).

Volume is perhaps music's primary means of connoting power: a 'powerful' sound is roughly synonymous with a 'loud' sound. We may recall here Dean Green's appeal to 'men of manly spirits' (see above: 130) to echo with 'loud acclaim' the 'loud shouts' in Westminster Abbey. The 'Hallelujah' Chorus is indeed sung loudly: it ends with the most sustained use in the oratorio of Handel's highest dynamic marking (*fortissimo*). In view of the links already suggested between the two choruses that frame this section of *Messiah*, it is worth noticing that Handel's first use of this marking occurs in the final section of 'Lift up your heads'. If trumpets and drums provide the added volume in Handel's original orchestration of 'Hallelujah', later arrangers would match this by including whatever forces were available at the equivalent points. It was, indeed, primarily to enhance the power of Handel's choruses that the performing forces grew to such gigantic proportions during the Victorian era. However, the impression of power does not seem to me to depend on dynamic level alone. It is the result of a combination of factors, including the natural resonance of major triads in the homophonic sections, the registral placing of the voices to achieve maximum fullness of sound, the frequent reinforcement of metrical accents, and the 'irresistible' forward impulse provided by the clear and regular recurrence of the basic patterns of harmonic progression established by the conventions of tonality. This is music which seems to sweep all before it, and this indeed provides (to return to Cook's terminology) an 'enabling similarity' between it and the British Empire. The requisite 'blended space' is provided by the coronation performance, where the

attributes of music and empire meet to produce a meaning which is not entirely new but nevertheless articulates a range of previously-encountered elements in a new way.

It is not only the separate elements that are significant but also their collective constitution of a particular musical style, which developed its own connotations as a result of its employment in other works, and the deployment of those works in other contexts of use. Paul Henry Lang in his book on Handel refers to the 'ceremonial manner' as the English Baroque church style par excellence (1966: 222). It was typified by the music which Handel wrote for the great ceremonial services to give thanks for military victories (such as the *Dettingen Te Deum*). Religion and patriotism combined in these services (as in the 1902 coronation) because of the British confidence that their victories had been won as a result of the special favour of God. Lang says: 'Almost all commentators agree on the tone of this church music, and the terms "monumental," *Kolossalstil*, and so on are freely used' (ibid: 217). The same style is evident in such oratorio choruses as 'Hallelujah', which thus come to have similar meanings. Lang argues that 'no single recipe brings about such a style, only the powerful ideal of a people, their belief in their righteousness, their optimism, their conviction of their own moral strength'. Whether or not this is correct, it does point to the deep connections between this musical style and an ideology that was, in certain respects, as active in early twentieth-century South Africa as it had been in eighteenth-century England.

While there may be no written evidence that any of the colonists understood the performance in the ways suggested above, there is equally nothing to suggest the contrary. The musical elements were directly experienced by anyone who attended the performance, and both the immediate occasion for the performance and its broader socio-historical context ensured that particular ideas of Empire were in the forefront of people's consciousness. Added to this is the fact that evidence does exist for similar constructions of meaning having been made, both in the earlier South African history and in England. I shall mention just one further example which is unusually explicit and fits the present context particularly well. Howard Smither (1985: 346) quotes a writer in the *Musical Times* of 1877 who makes power (via a military analogy) the link between Handel and British imperialism:

We, as an imperial race, should appreciate the master's imperial effects
The French Caesar used to win victories by launching masses at his enemy's centre. Handel too fights in masses and overwhelms by straightforward blows. You cannot give him too large a force his power is doubled without encumbrance. Such a musician deserves to be the musician of an empire.

The British victory had secured the blessings of Empire for the colonists. Amongst these, freedom receives special emphasis in the passages quoted above, being contrasted with the supposed 'despotism' that would have resulted had the Boers triumphed in the war. While it is hardly convincing to present the mighty British Empire itself as seeking freedom from oppression, the position of the British colonists in South Africa, on whose behalf the imperial forces claimed to act, could indeed be constructed in this way. Those in the Transvaal had lived under a regime which they regarded as oppressive, and those in Natal feared the possibility of losing the freedoms they enjoyed. The joy expressed in much of *Messiah* could be attached to any cause of rejoicing, but the music would undoubtedly be experienced as a more powerful expression for particular recipients if some connection could be made

between their cause for rejoicing and that represented by the music. A central element in any understanding of the Messiah figure (whatever else it may signify) is that the Messiah will bring liberation to the people of Israel. If Britons are identified with the Israelites, then the Messiah (understood as Jesus) can be seen as the one who brings freedom to them also. In this way, the entire conception of *Messiah* becomes singularly appropriate to the situation of the British colonists in South Africa. As they celebrate the coming of the Messiah, for example in the chorus 'For unto us a child is born', they celebrate at the same time their own freedom. If 'the government shall be upon his shoulder', they can know that it will be passed down to them via a chain of authority that will continue to ensure their freedom.

Civilization and progress are identified as other benefits of Empire. *Messiah's* ability to act as a symbol of these qualities depends not so much on its 'content' as on its unique status and prestige, which have been a persistent theme in previous discussions. 'Greatness' is an attribute constantly ascribed both to *Messiah* and to Britain and its Empire. Only the greatest work of the greatest composer could adequately celebrate the greatest Empire. At the same time, the perception of *Messiah's* greatness would be powerfully reinforced by having been considered an appropriate choice for performance in honour of the monarch who reigns over this greatest of Empires. The significance of the performance is that it could provide a felt experience of this dual greatness. As South African Britons listened to *Messiah* they could simultaneously take pride in their membership of the Empire and their participation in culture of the highest class. The re-establishment of British rule guaranteed their future progress, and the fact that *Messiah* could be performed acted as a concrete sign of the progress thus far achieved. 'O thou that tellest' contains the line: 'the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee'. This might originally have been addressed to 'the cities of Judah', but it is now addressed to the cities of Empire, Pietermaritzburg and Johannesburg now established among them. When their inhabitants considered how the glory of the Lord had arisen on them, or pondered the 'glad tidings of good things' commended in 'How beautiful are the feet', they would surely have done so at least partly in terms of the many blessings of Empire.

British imperial ideology entailed not just the idea that the Empire is powerful, but also that it is a universal good. All who live under its benevolent rule receive its blessings, including those who are not ethnically British and may not even identify with it. Elaborating on the significance of the royal visit of 1901, the *Natal Witness* editorial (referred to above) claimed not only that 'the Briton will welcome the supreme power that embodies all the greatness of his race', but also that 'the native and the Indian will see the Prince whose fathers gave them liberty and peace' (*NW*, 1901a). The universalizing assumption that *Messiah* was simply 'the greatest music' (rather than being qualified as the greatest British or even the greatest European music) would have made its performance seem a fitting confirmation of this ideology.

The working out of this claim in relation to South Africa's black African population will be considered in Parts 3 and 4, but in the present context we may note that it is also consonant with the universalizing Christian message embodied in *Messiah's* libretto. It is present most explicitly in one of the less frequently performed choruses, 'Their sound is gone out into all lands', but it is implicit in many other places. The reign celebrated in the 'Hallelujah' Chorus is a universal one: 'The kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ'. When 'the glory of the

Lord shall be revealed', prophesies Isaiah in *Messiah's* first chorus, 'all flesh shall see it together'. It is difficult to ignore the verbal echo in the *Witness* editorial: 'The native and the Indian will see ...' – a representative of the British royal family, yes, but also a representative of Christian civilization. Will they not therefore see 'the glory of the Lord'? There are some further striking similarities between the *Witness's* reference to 'the *Prince* whose *fathers* gave them liberty and *peace*' and the text which ends the chorus 'For unto us': 'the everlasting *Father*, the *Prince* of *peace*'. It is with good reason that Jeffrey Richards observes, 'the imagery of Christianity and of British imperialism are so intertwined as to keep slipping over from one to the other' (Richards, 2001: 378). In the 'Hallelujah' Chorus, God is presented as 'omnipotent'; in the *Witness* the royal visitor is the embodiment of 'the supreme power'. Is this supreme power God or the King? From the point of view of imperial ideology, our momentary uncertainty is entirely appropriate.

The coronation therefore provided an occasion for a whole cluster of interrelated values to be brought together in the symbolic person of the monarch, and *Messiah's* appropriateness for celebrating this occasion stems from the number of remarkably similar values that it also brings together. Perhaps a more accurate way of putting this would be to say that *Messiah* afforded a number of attributes which could be highlighted, accentuated or inflected in specific ways through their similarity to attributes of the performance context. Since the relationship is reciprocal, it could equally be said that *Messiah* helped to highlight, accentuate or inflect attributes belonging to the performance context. Since both *Messiah* and monarchy, in their specific ways, bring together so many of the values highlighted in our discussion of the entire South African history thus far, an examination of the specific connections between them will provide a fitting conclusion to this chapter.

The links between the 'Hallelujah' Chorus and royal imagery have already been discussed (see above: 52), but the context of the coronation would have facilitated a response on the part of the performers and listeners to a chain of monarchical associations that runs through the whole oratorio. If 'Hallelujah' portrays God/Messiah as the omnipotent King of kings, 'Lift up your heads' identifies the 'Lord strong and mighty' with 'the King of glory'. Royal connotations then come to suffuse the several other choruses (all amongst the best known) that emphasise the word 'glory'. It is present in the first chorus ('And the glory of the Lord') and the last ('Worthy is the Lamb' – to receive, amongst other things, 'glory'). Wherever the glory of the Lord appears, the idea that this is *kingly* glory calls to mind the earthly king. Again, this association becomes much stronger and carries greater conviction to the listeners if it depends not simply on the common term 'king', but on the idea that the British king, in particular, is the one closest to God. Linda Colley (1992: 202) has argued that royal apologists presented the Hanoverian dynasty as occupying the British throne because of divine Providence, and successive monarchs as ruling, if not by divine right as in an earlier epoch, then at least with divine approval.

We may recall here the words of the British national anthem, which was sung at the end of the Pietermaritzburg *Messiah* performance, would have been sung at both State Concerts, and was undoubtedly sung at countless other events related to the coronation. It invokes God's blessings on the sovereign ('God save our gracious King'), and then introduces a cluster of words that we have already highlighted in the *Messiah* choruses: 'Send him *victorious* / Happy and *glorious* / Long to *reign* over

us'. Another intertextual relationship is worth noticing here, since it involves words from both the national anthem and from *Messiah* and illustrates very well the complex web of equivalences that could be set up between divine and earthly realms.

Pietermaritzburg's State Concert was to begin with an anthem which Handel had written for another coronation 175 years earlier, *Zadok the Priest*. The text is as follows:

Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet appointed Solomon King. And all the people rejoic'd, and said: God save the King, long live the King, may the King live for ever! Amen! Alleluia!

This enables not only an association between the divinely-appointed Solomon and the British monarch, but also between praise of divine and earthly kings. The meaning of the final 'Alleluia' in this anthem celebrating the British monarch will clearly merge with that of the 'Hallelujah' Chorus when they are placed on the same programme. While both the national anthem and the 'Hallelujah' Chorus refer to the reigns of their respective kings, the anticipated length of each reign initially seems to differentiate them: 'long' in the former, 'for ever and ever' in the latter. *Zadok* shows how even in this respect the one reign can blur into the other: 'Long live the King, may the King live for ever!'

If the British, like the ancient Israelites, are God's people, their King is God's representative on earth (as the text of *Zadok* clearly confirms). The British King's representative in Natal is clearly Sir Henry McCallum. It is in this way that a performance of *Messiah* can come to support the entire social hierarchy discussed above. The Governor, listening to 'Hallelujah', could feel himself to be part of a firmly established order. The performers were directly linked to the structure of local government, through their official recognition (and financial support) as Borough Organist, and Municipal Choir and Orchestra. These civic associations were enhanced by the fact that the performance took place in the Town Hall, the official centre of Pietermaritzburg's public life, the very important place where very important people gathered and very important performances were held (to borrow Carol Delaney's useful expansion of the concept of the VIP (2004: 367)).

Like the monarch, *Messiah* could also function as a convincing symbol of the unity of this social order through the claim made for its universal appeal. This was partly, as we have seen earlier, a matter of its ability to transcend religious divisions, and partly of the notion of its accessibility to 'cultured and uncultured' alike. Both these unifying tendencies were already present in the eighteenth century, as William Weber has shown. He refers to the way Handel's oratorios 'established a common ground for expressing certain basic religious beliefs that reunited the English as no other area of the nation's culture had done' (1992: 121). He traces the roots of its 'universal' appeal to the support it received both from London's 'Concert of Antient Music' and the provincial music festivals, the former giving it intellectual prestige and the latter a broad public (ibid: 226). All these elements were well established in the British *Messiah* discourse by the mid-nineteenth century, as is shown by a passage from *The Edinburgh Review* for July 1857 which links them, describing *Messiah* as having 'almost won the reality of an article of belief and the solemnity of an object of worship, by its power to adapt itself to all intelligences, to touch the lowliest, to raise the loftiest, to content the most fastidious' (quoted in R. M. Myers, 1948: 237).

Weber's connection of Handel with the Concert of Antient Music reminds us that *Messiah* even fitted the monarchy's claim to ancient tradition. The Concert was the first musical society that regularly presented programmes of music more than twenty years old and so facilitated the construction of *Messiah* as 'ancient' music. Its directors were responsible for organizing the first Handel Commemoration in 1784, an occasion which, according to Weber (1992: 223), celebrated the resolution of the constitutional crisis between Crown and Parliament, and more broadly, 'the unification of political elites that had been developing over the previous three decades. It dramatized the reunion of Tory and Whig within a new political community, a kind of Establishment'. Through its participation in the 1902 coronation, *Messiah* renewed its association with an establishment network encompassing both a local South African order and a global British order.

Again like the monarch, *Messiah* could be a symbol not just of British social unity but of the broader unity of the Empire. Jeffrey Richards (2001: 469) specifically identifies shared culture as a source of imperial unity, citing literary emblems such as Dickens, Scott, Shakespeare and Tennyson, 'revered wherever the English language was spoken' (ibid: 470). There is no doubt that at the time of the coronation, Handel would head the list of musical emblems revered wherever British people sang, with *Messiah* a long way ahead of any of his other works. Just as Britons in Pietermaritzburg Cathedral could feel their connection to Westminster Abbey by their common participation in a shared liturgy, so those performing or listening to *Messiah* could be aware that they belonged to a culture shared with (and given the highest status in) the imperial centre and all those regions of the world where the British had settled. On the occasion of the coronation, the words of *Messiah*'s final chorus afforded South African Britons the opportunity to express, along with the rest of the Empire, their pride in their identity as loyal subjects of both the Messiah-God and the King-Emperor: 'Blessing and honour, glory and power be unto him that sitteth upon the throne'.

But what of those who did not already share that culture? The British were not simply concerned to recreate their own culture for themselves in those places to which they transported it. It was also their mission to convert the people they encountered to Christianity and simultaneously to 'civilize' them – which meant replacing their existing indigenous culture with that of Britain. The words of William Ellis of the London Missionary Society may be taken to represent the nineteenth-century consensus: 'No man can become a Christian, in the true sense of the term, however savage he may have been before, without becoming a civilized man' (quoted in Richards, 2001: 386). Following Brian Stanley's study of Protestant missions and British imperialism, Richards identifies one of the assumptions underlying this dictum as the idea that nineteenth-century Britain was the model of Christian society and culture which had to be adopted by converts if 'heathendom' and all its attendant evils were to be eliminated. It is this imperial impulse that links the story of the 'English' *Messiah* with that of the 'African' *Messiah*. In turning to this second story, we shall see how – to use David Cannadine's terms (2001: 27) – the 'hierarchy of social status and prestige' discussed above was superimposed on another hierarchy, much more significant for the future of South Africa: this was the 'hierarchy of race and colour'.

PART 3: THE 'AFRICAN' MESSIAH 1

CHAPTER 10: Eastern Cape beginnings

To my knowledge, the first published material attempting an overview of the history of *Messiah* in South Africa's black African community appears in the score of Sam Shabalala's translation of *Messiah* into Zulu, in the form of an introductory essay by Mzilikazi Khumalo. There he states that 'the earliest record we have of a black choir presenting Handel's music' dates from 1891, in a report on a performance by the 'Zulu Choir' that took place in Westminster Abbey (Khumalo, 1995: n.p.). This is also the earliest reference given in Markus Detterbeck's discussion of the Western repertoire performed by African choirs (part of his doctoral thesis on South African choral music (2002: 360)). However, the involvement of African singers with *Messiah* goes back at least to the middle years of the nineteenth century. I have found three earlier references, one from 1863 and two from 1885, the importance of which goes beyond the simple fact that they push back the date. They also provide the first building blocks for an explanation of the process by which *Messiah* was not only introduced into the black community but also became so widely known. British influence is once again inescapable, but it is mediated via two fields that were, for African people at this time, inextricably linked: Christian missions and education.

Grahamstown, 1863: A tonic sol-fa triumph

Tim Radloff's account of music in Grahamstown between 1863 and 1879 includes, somewhat unusually for this type of dissertation, a section on 'Music Teaching: Non-European' (Radloff, 1969: 7-13). One of his sources is a series of articles on 'Musical Education' which appeared in the *Graham's Town Journal* in May 1863, and it is here that *Messiah* is first mentioned as having been taught to African people. The subject of the articles is the tonic sol-fa system and its advantages. Tonic sol-fa's rise to prominence in Britain was a relatively recent phenomenon. Detterbeck summarizes the development, and its significance for South Africa, as follows:

Tonic sol-fa owes its existence to the drive to improve congregational singing in Britain during the third decade of the nineteenth century, and its introduction into South Africa followed soon after as a result of its popularity and enormous success. Mission societies started to use it as a tool to teach hymns to their converts. The following wide dissemination of Curwen's system and of music printed in tonic sol-fa led to the almost universal adoption of this system at [black] schools and churches in South Africa.

(2002: 167)

As evidence for its efficacy, the writer of the aforementioned articles, Henry Bidwell, states that

in this city ... the natives, after a few weeks training by Mr. Birkett, were able to sing at sight some of the difficult compositions of Handel and Mendelssohn,

including the “Hallelujah Chorus” and “Hail Judea!” of the former, and selections from “Hymn of Praise” of the latter.

(*GTJ*, 1863b)

Radloff also mentions a specific public concert, on 2 October of same year, at which ‘Hallelujah’ was sung. ‘The Native Choir’ was conducted by Christopher Birkett, responsible for training the singers in the sol-fa system, and accompanied in a varied programme by Mr G.W. Impey on the harmonium. In the ‘Hallelujah’ Chorus, which ended the first (sacred) part of the programme, the choir and harmonium were joined by ‘Mr Weisbecker’s Band of Stringed Instruments’, which also provided several items of its own (*GTJ*, 1863d). An extensive review of this concert appeared in the *Journal*.

In the first paragraph of the review the writer describes the audience as ‘highly respectable’, and even uses the word I have frequently associated with performances of the ‘English’ *Messiah*, noting that the performance was ‘numerously attended by the *elite* of our little community’ (*GTJ*, 1863e, italics in original). This was clearly, then, a performance by black singers for a white audience, in which the white community showed a considerable degree of interest. This already suggests that the racial divide was not so absolute that under certain circumstances a degree of bridging was possible. The reviewer describes the collaboration between the singers and their accompanist in terms which explicitly refer to two different systems of musical training, yet seem also to resonate with a sense of the more basic difference that was staged, and perhaps bridged, in this performance. The reviewer was struck by the beautiful manner in which the natives, trained exclusively under the Tonic Sol-fa system, and Mr. Impey, a musician of the old school, worked together. It was a complete triumph over the old prevailing prejudice that the two systems are antagonistic; - that the students under the new system are lost when brought into connection with the old.

(*GTJ*, 1863e)

The two systems were on this occasion embodied, within the same physical space, by people who might also be seen as having triumphed over other forms of prejudice that would have made it impossible for them to work together.

By its very nature, of course, the event foregrounded racial difference. The first sentence of the review refers to ‘the performers of both colours’, and the singers are characterised on their first appearance as ‘sable’, and when they rise to perform ‘Hallelujah’ as ‘dark’. (Needless to say, the reviewer never finds it necessary to characterise the members of the string orchestra in terms of their colour.) Yet the tone of the review is, for the most part, surprisingly free of the kind of condescension that marks the Bidwell articles previously mentioned. In the first of those, Bidwell clearly assumes a quasi-biological, evolutionary racial hierarchy:

Many of my readers have heard the performances of the Kafir choir after a few week’s training by Mr. Birkett. Of course their singing was not perfection – but when it is considered that these colored [sic] vocalists actually *sang from music*, actually *read their parts* from *this new notation*, actually were natives with native intellects, will they not at once accord praise to the system that could accomplish so much in so short a time with such material?

(*GTJ*, 1863a, italics in original)

In Bidwell's scheme, it is the system, and to a lesser degree the teacher, that are represented as the agents and receive the credit for being able to succeed even with such 'unpromising' material (although admittedly his primary purpose is precisely to focus on the system and persuade his readers of its value). In the review, while the system and Mr Birkett are given due acknowledgement, it is the achievement of the singers that is repeatedly stressed. They are described as 'the heroes and heroines of the evening'. Instead of simply being the passive recipients of tuition, they are granted some agency. Of one item, the reviewer says: 'We have before noticed the grand and effective manner in which the natives perform this piece. We can only say that on this occasion they, if possible, surpassed themselves' (*GTJ*, 1863e).

The lines of difference are drawn mainly in terms of the audience's reaction to the dress of the female singers. On their first appearance the reviewer says that they were 'decked out with all their characteristic taste' and 'provoked a critical titter throughout the audience'. During the interval the audience 'discussed the performance, and criticised, with good humour, the gaudy dresses of the female vocalists as they passed and repassed through the room'. This was clearly the point at which the attempt to match the cultural norms of audience and singers broke down, and which enabled those members of the audience who were so inclined to reassert the difference between themselves and the singers. Even if we can take at face value the reviewer's opinion that the comments were made 'with good humour', it is only the assumption of a secure position of superiority that allows the observers the condescension of treating lightly this lapse from their standards of taste.

When it comes to the music, however, there seems to be no attempt to detect or reinscribe racial difference. The 'critical titter' that greeted the singers' first appearance 'in time subsided ... and the company soon became rapt listeners to the inspired strains of Mendelssohn's *Lobgesang*'. But the greatest test for the singers was provided by what the reviewer calls 'the piece of the evening': 'the immortal *Hallelujah Chorus*'. Here they were attempting a piece regarded as occupying the highest level of achievement within the musical tradition of Europe. If they could cope with this, there could be no question of their abilities; to fail at this point would be to open themselves to all manner of comment (however 'good humoured') on their inability to rise above a certain level, which could be taken more generally to confirm their inferior status. Much was at stake, and the reviewer confirms that 'it was an anxious moment for those interested in the success of the evening, when the dark singers rose to attempt this piece'.

In the reviewer's opinion, however, 'it went off admirably', and it seems that the audience's response was enthusiastic: 'The promoters of the entertainment must have felt repaid for all their anxiety, when they heard the loud and continued demonstrations of satisfaction, which greeted the performers as they resumed their seats.' The reviewer next invokes the standards of the metropole, establishing at the same time his credentials as a critic:

We have heard this wonderful piece of musical mechanism performed by three thousand of the best performers England could muster, and, candidly, in this case, the comparison would be "odious". It is a piece which requires a very full and powerful choir to render it effectively; we can only say that we have seldom heard so small a number of voices sing it better.

(*GTJ*, 1863e)

This is not simply, as it might appear from this example alone, a comparison between ‘natives’ and ‘Europeans’, to the detriment of the former. It is rather a comparison between the metropole and the colony, of a kind which, as we have seen, was frequently made in the case of ‘white’ performances also (for example, the 1863 Cape Town performance: see above: 62).

The choir’s performance of the ‘Hallelujah’ Chorus thus serves to establish their credentials as musical equals of their white counterparts; and could this not serve as a sign of their potential for full acceptance into colonial society? That acceptance seems to be quite close as, towards the end of the performance, they launch into ‘God Bless the Prince of Wales’:

It would have done our beloved Queen good to have heard the enthusiasm with which her sable subjects invoked at the end of each verse, in her Majesty’s own English, God’s blessing on her eldest son. It would have cheered her widowed heart could she have witnessed the loyal sympathy of the audience as the singers appealed to their fealty and love. The piece was enthusiastically encored.

(GTJ, 1863e)

Here the singers appear to be drawn into the imperial circle; indeed, they become allies in the imperial cause. If they are able thus to evoke that ‘chord which is always strung up to the highest pitch in the hearts of the good people of Grahamstown – we mean their loyalty’, surely this makes a strong case for their own membership of the British empire? At the last moment, however, the reviewer backs away from these implications. The national anthem gives the audience an opportunity to sing, and the reviewer suggests that they do so ‘as only freeborn Englishmen can sing a National Anthem’. Thus is the circle of exclusion drawn once again.

The audience’s construction of the performance was thus inextricably bound up with the attitudes taken by the white community towards the black inhabitants of the region. These ranged from what Leon de Kock (1996: 43) calls the ‘rabid prejudice’ of those who regarded Robert Godlonton as their champion (see above: 47) to ‘the more sophisticated philosophical position of evangelical philanthropy’, though De Kock points out that both poles ‘implicitly shared the assumptions of “civilised” superiority drawn from eighteenth-century scholarly thought’. As he reminds us, ‘There was a common assumption in the eighteenth century that non-Western civilisations represented earlier stages in human progress, frozen into immobility while the European world advanced’ (ibid: 39). These stages were often represented as savagery, barbarism and civilization. In the eyes of many early humanitarians, Africans belonged to the middle category, as ‘malleable and oppressed people who would accept with gratitude whatever might be done for them’. For John Philip, a notable representative of the humanitarian perspective who was much involved in the affairs of the Eastern Cape, ‘racial difference was commensurate with a lack of the master civilisation’ (ibid: 40). Such views developed into the dominant perspective amongst British people throughout the Victorian era, now often described as the ‘civilizing mission’. The British felt that they had a right and duty to ‘improve the rest of the world by a programme of Christian regeneration, to spread civilisation on the British model, since this was the only – and God-ordained – perfection open to mankind’ (Ronald Hyam, quoted by De Kock, 1996: 41).

Several aspects of the way the concert by the Native Choir is constructed by the reviewer seem to belong to this ideological world. For those in the audience who shared this perspective, the proficient singing of the 'Hallelujah' Chorus could easily have lent support to John Philip's egalitarian ideal, quite radical for its time, in which there was 'potentially no limit to the aspirations of civilised natives' (Keegan, 1996: 283). Once again, 'Hallelujah' would have seemed especially appropriate in its representation of both Christianity and the best of the high culture of 'civilization'. Given the pre-existing 'myth' of *Messiah* previously discussed, the experience of listening to it would have been able to activate an immediate sense that this was the high point of 'civilisation on the British model', and at the same time a gratifying confirmation that the civilizing mission was not only possible but making notable progress. The cause for celebration in this case was very close to that of the original context of the 'Hallelujah' Chorus, the triumph of the Messiah-God, specifically over those who opposed the spread of the gospel. Translated into the context of mid-nineteenth-century Grahamstown, this would have been equated with the triumph of Christianity itself. From the perspective of the civilizing mission, the performance thus made visible and audible the triumph of civilization over barbarism.

The 'mid-Victorian objective of turning Africans into black Englishmen' (Terreblanche, 2002: 251) was of course limited in several ways. The exclusionary comments in the review, working to counter the bid for equality and acceptance presented by the successful performance of the 'Hallelujah' Chorus, may be derived from the contradictions of humanitarian liberalism itself. As Keegan points out, although mainstream humanitarians like Philip 'expressed little overt racial antipathy', they nevertheless had a strong sense of class hierarchy which meant that they could seldom 'envisage non-Europeans aspiring to their class status' (Keegan, 1996: 283). The settler bourgeoisie, amongst whom there was considerable antagonism to humanitarians such as Philip, came to propagate a more utilitarian form of liberalism which was also accepted by the colonial authorities, especially Sir George Grey, governor in the period immediately preceding this performance (1854-1861) (see Terreblanche, 2002: 199-204). This involved the granting of certain rights and privileges to a small African elite, while simultaneously ensuring that the majority were drawn into cheap labour. Both strategies had the effect of undermining existing African social patterns, Grey being particularly concerned to curtail the authority of the chiefs. The members of the 'Native Choir' clearly belonged to the small elite who were given access to educational institutions, one of which (the 'Native Day-School') was indeed to benefit from the proceeds of the concert. In the terms of utilitarian liberalism, the performance of the 'Hallelujah' Chorus demonstrated the successful creation of a Westernized and Christianized 'collaborating class' (ibid: 251).

But what of the perspective of the singers themselves? There is of course no direct access to this: our knowledge of the performance itself is available only through the account given by the reviewer. We do, however, have quite extensive knowledge of the general outlook of the broader group from which the singers were almost certainly drawn: mission-educated Christians or *amakholwa* (believers). The following comments are significant because they echo in this new context several of the themes already noted in connection with the 'English' *Messiah*. Although referring to Natal, they may be applied equally to the situation in the Eastern Cape:

The *amakholwa* consciously developed an identity that was located in the colonial discourse of progress They also put themselves forward primarily

as the subjects of the British monarch, in the process stressing their independence of chiefly authority The mission stations became enclaves where new identities could be forged from a combination of education, Christianity and petty commodity production Aware of their progress in terms of white colonists' own standards in economic accumulation, literacy, dress, command of the English language and its cultural codes, the *amakholwa* began to press against the limitations imposed on 'improving natives' by the system of customary law.

(Morrell, Wright, & Meintjes, 1996: 43)

The authors quote words spoken in the same year as the Grahamstown concert (1863), at a meeting of *amakholwa*. The first quotation is from Daniel Msimang:

We point with pride to the dark distance from which we have fled. We shout with joy because we are in the light. We are told, 'You are still in ignorance and darkness.'

(ibid)

The second is from Johannes Kumalo:

We have left the black race and clung to the white. We imitate them in everything we can. We feel we are in the midst of civilised people, and that when we became converts to their faith, we belonged to them. It was as a stone thrown into the water, impossible to return We have been protected since, and are happy. One thing alone detracts from our security. The law by which our cases are decided.

(ibid: 44)

This suggests that the members of the choir, too, would have regarded their successful singing of the 'Hallelujah' Chorus as evidence of their progress in terms of the norms presented to them by the missionaries and settlers, norms which they had indeed internalized. The music demonstrated both their education and their acceptance of Christianity. Indeed, it could very well have been experienced as a 'shout of joy' marking their emergence into the 'light'. They had performed a piece of music occupying the highest status in British culture, a song in praise of God as the supreme monarch and his Son the Messiah, alongside songs in praise of the earthly British monarch and her son the Prince of Wales. Surely their proficiency in these items showed that they should be recognized as full members of the British empire? All three quotations show their desire for acceptance, but also alert us to the qualified nature of the acceptance so far accorded them by the colonists. As Keegan says in the context of the Eastern Cape, 'The promise implicitly held out that they would eventually reach a state of equality with whites was remote and contingent, and ultimately overwhelmed' (1996: 285).

It is likely that the singers belonged mainly to the group known as Mfengu (Fingoes). Although there is some dispute surrounding their identity, it seems to be generally accepted that they were 'an amalgam of immigrant groups of various northern Nguni origins who arrived in Xhosa territory over a period of time' (ibid: 146). During the war of 1834-5 they were persuaded to seek the protection of the colonial authorities (Saunders & Southey, 2001 [1998]: 113). The Governor, Sir Benjamin D'Urban, saw the advantage of turning them into colonial allies, creating a buffer between the settlers and the Xhosa, and helping to supplement the supply of labour (Keegan, 1996: 146-7). Many were resettled near Grahamstown (where the oldest part of the township is still known as Fingo Village), and 'quickly adapted to Western ideas and Western

modes of production' (Terreblanche, 2002: 204). They were also the group which supplied the majority of early missionary converts (see G. A. Duncan, 2003: 19ff.). Learning and singing the 'Hallelujah' Chorus would have been entirely in line with their adoption of Western culture, their loyalty to the British, and their conversion to Christianity. It does not seem impossible that, prompted by the text, they might have heard in the music an expression of the power of the God of the missionaries, as well as the British monarch whose power was said to derive from that God. Having given allegiance to the Christian God and the British monarch, they had been duly rewarded with land grants (Terreblanche, 2002: 205). They therefore had some reason to celebrate the victories of Christianity, civilization and the British army (represented in this context as inseparable), and here as on so many other occasions the 'Hallelujah' Chorus must have seemed a singularly appropriate means of doing this.

A new agency: Peter Masiza

The second-earliest reference I have found to *Messiah* being sung by a black choir dates from 1885. It comes from Mandy Goedhals's research on the life and work of Peter Masiza, the 'First Black Priest in the Church of the Province of South Africa' as she describes him in the title of an article publishing her findings (1989). Masiza was ordained as an Anglican priest in 1877, and worked in the Eastern (Transkei) part of the Eastern Cape. According to Goedhals, Masiza was 'an ardent choirmaster, drilling his choirs in the tonic solfa' (ibid: 26). *Messiah* was one of the works he taught to his choirs, and this provides evidence that its spread, like that of Christianity, was no longer exclusively in the hands of the white missionaries and settlers.

This assumes particular significance in the light of recent research on the whole missionary enterprise, which suggests that 'Christianity in Africa took such deep root because it was spread by Africans' (Hofmeyr, 2004: 239). In the last quarter of the nineteenth century 'a generation of Africans reached adulthood which included many ... who accepted Western culture, or much of it, as the norm' (Hunt Davis, quoted in De Kock, 1996: 33). Such people not only sought to conduct their own lives in what they considered a 'civilized' manner, but were also 'anxious to acculturate their fellow Africans' (De Kock, 1996: 33). In accounting for the popularity of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* in Africa, Isabel Hofmeyr concludes that 'African intellectual agency was central' (ibid). There is insufficient evidence to claim that Masiza was literally the first African to teach and conduct *Messiah*, although he may have been. He can nevertheless be taken as a symbol of this pivotal development in the process by which *Messiah* became familiar to African choirs. While it had indeed been introduced in the context of mission education, from this point it can no longer be viewed simply as an imposition by agents from Europe. Peter Masiza, as both the first black Anglican priest and a teacher of *Messiah*, stands for a new agency.

Goedhals sees his musical activities as typical of his more general attitude that 'acceptance by Europeans and imitation of European ways' constituted the highest good (ibid: 27). She suggests that it was not only his identity as an ordained priest that predisposed him to accept the views and values of European missionaries, but also his identity as an Mfengu. The latter point provides some confirmation for my suggestion of how the 'Hallelujah' Chorus might have been understood by the singers in the Grahamstown performance.

Similar associations as on that occasion must have been present when Masiza led massed choirs in a performance of 'Hallelujah' in January 1885. The occasion was the opening of a chapel at Saint Timothy's, Enconcolora (ibid: 26). If Masiza's aim in building chapels at the various outstations he visited was, on one level, 'the greater glory of God' (as Goedhals says), a chorus in praise of God was obviously fitting. However, Goedhals suggests that on another level this practice was far from innocuous, being 'ideologically and materially subversive of traditional African institutions'. In particular, 'the existence of the chapel and the school challenged the authority of the chief' (ibid). It seems possible then that a more specific local meaning might have been heard in the music's glorifying of God as a 'King of kings' who will 'reign for ever and ever'. The appearance of a square stone chapel building where previously there had been only round wattle and daub huts constitutes a rather literal representation of the chorus's text: 'The kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ.' Integration into the latter kingdom was, in this time and place, inseparable from integration into the political order of empire, the social order of Britain, the cultural order of Europe, and the economic order of capitalism. The meanings attached to 'Hallelujah' could not escape implication in this whole cluster of associated ideas.

As happened elsewhere, 'Hallelujah' seems here to have preceded a more general familiarity with *Messiah*. Towards the end of 1885, Masiza wrote:

Our choirs are busy preparing, practising Anthems for Advent and Christmas. I work them up in *Messiah* which book they rather complain the Anthems are too difficult ... The natives are general known as a race fond of music, and so they are.

(Quoted in Goedhals, 1989: 27)

In this may be seen not only a reflection of the British association between *Messiah* and the Christmas season, but also the expression of an idea that was to be repeated countless times over the years, that African people have a particular affinity for music, and a 'natural' ability which is recognized by Europeans. In a situation where they were routinely regarded as inferior or backward, this must have acted as a powerful incentive to develop their abilities in this field in ways likely to receive European approval. Veit Erlmann notes that 'for turn-of-the-century *amakholwa* communities, choral music was the supreme manifestation of improvement and progress' (1996: 226). For all the reasons already given, no work could have served better as a sign of how far a given community had advanced than *Messiah*.

Goedhals locates her discussion of Masiza within the broader debates surrounding nineteenth-century South African missionary history. In some interpretations the role of the missionaries has been seen as essentially positive (bringing the benefits of Christianity and Western civilization to the people of Africa). In others, it has been seen as essentially negative (as facilitating the conquest of Africa by the forces of imperialism and capitalism). A third view accepts aspects of both these interpretations, but focuses on the ways in which Africans themselves were able to turn elements of Christianity and Western culture to their own purposes, sometimes in opposition to the representatives of empire and capital. This view pays particular attention to those who emerged as a new African elite, largely as a result of having undergone a missionary education. As we shall see in the next section, the third early reference I have found to *Messiah* being sung by a black choir takes us to the kind of

missionary educational institutions that were primarily responsible for this development.

The missionary institutions and the emergence of an African elite

As far as music is concerned, Deirdre Hansen (1968: 1-3) summarizes the role of the missionaries in relation to their African converts as follows:

The missionaries brought with them not only their religion but also their entire culture The influence of the European Christian missionaries marked a turning point in the cultural and especially in the musical history of the Cape Nguni The missionaries lacked all appreciation of what was good and useful and of what was genuinely valuable in the culture they encountered To a large extent, the missionaries were the victims of the ideas current among their own cultural groups at the time, and this fact does make their actions more intelligible. The musical changes introduced by the missionaries were far-reaching, and were introduced in the first place through the church service, of which singing was an integral part. When the missionaries came to work among the Cape Nguni, they brought with them the liturgical and musical essentials of their church – their congregational hymns Perhaps even more important than congregational singing was education In music the missionaries introduced the tonic solfa system into their schools.

The elements mentioned by Hansen (valorization of European culture, the teaching of the tonic sol-fa system, and the use of Christian hymns) all seem likely to have played a significant role in laying the foundations for the introduction of *Messiah* to African singers. The first two are already familiar from our discussion of Birkett and Masiza. With regard to the third, Detterbeck has discussed the extent to which hymn-singing came to be associated with the ‘educated Native’ in the nineteenth century: ‘Early reports, diaries and letters show that the missionaries used hymns as a medium to frame, depict and emphasise the Christian message in their mission work’ (2002: 126).

In the present context, I would suggest that the importance of the hymn in preparing the way for *Messiah* was threefold. Firstly, it made communal singing a familiar and integral part of life on mission stations, and especially of Christian church services. Detterbeck in fact traces the origins of choirs in the African community to ‘the formation of small groups of converts who were eventually able to take the lead in singing and consequently familiarise the community with the hymns and psalms’ (ibid: 185). Without the existence of the choirs that emerged from this development, there could obviously have been no possibility of *Messiah* performances. Secondly, hymn-singing promoted the idea that music was a powerful means of conveying the Christian message, and especially of enabling words and their message to be thoroughly absorbed by the new converts. The ‘steady repetition of the same songs not only at the stage of training but later in the services and school assemblies’, together with the ‘formulaic structure of hymns and psalms’, resulted in ‘a recapitulation of central key words that in the end proved to be efficacious in instilling Christian doctrine’ (ibid: 142). *Messiah*’s centrally Christian message would be instilled not only by the amount of repetition required to learn its more complex

music, but also by the amount of repetition built into Handel's style of text setting. Finally, hymns made African singers thoroughly familiar with the patterns of Western tonal harmony. Grant Olwage (2003: 102-3) has noted the extent to which Victorian hymnody favoured diatonic harmony (as did the tonic sol-fa system), and even just the primary triads. Tonic sol-fa's creator, John Spencer Curwen, claimed that 'the ear never tires of plain chords' (quoted in Olwage, 2003: 104). This was precisely the kind of harmony characteristic of the most famous *Messiah* choruses, above all 'Hallelujah' (see above: 134; also below: 232).

While the above-mentioned elements were no doubt significant in preparing the ground for the introduction of *Messiah* by the missionaries, and for its adoption by the African Christians, it was really the expansion of missionary education beyond the elementary level, in the large institutions, that provided the environment in which it could firmly take root and grow. In the Eastern Cape, the two pre-eminent missionary institutions offering education to higher levels were Lovedale (Presbyterian) and Healdtown (Methodist). While Lovedale did provide basic general education and vocational training, the higher levels focused on the training of preachers and teachers (see De Kock, 1996: 73). Although all these elements were present at Healdtown at various times, vocational training was relatively unimportant, and ministerial training was moved first to Lesseyton and then to Fort Hare. Healdtown did provide general education in its Practising and High Schools, but its main focus became the training of teachers (see Hewson, 1959: 278). The important role of teachers in the establishment of *Messiah* in the African community will be noted several times in what follows.

Following the Cattle-Killing of 1856-7 and defeat in the war of 1877-8, the Xhosa found themselves in a vastly changed social situation with few options available to them. Many now began to see mission education as the way to advancement, and increasingly it was 'the African elite – made up by the people who had most fully assimilated European culture – which provided leadership' (De Kock, 1996: 61). Leaders such as John Tengo Jabavu 'became acculturated in Victorian-English style' (ibid: 63). Indeed, this was still the ethos recalled by Nelson Mandela from his time at Healdtown in the late 1930s, although by then there were also clearer signs of contestation:

The educated Englishman was our model; what we aspired to be were 'black Englishmen', as we were sometimes derisively called. We were taught – and believed – that the best ideas were English ideas, the best government was English government and the best men were Englishmen.

(Mandela, 1994: 44)

And, we might add, the best music was English music. As we have seen, there was no doubt that *Messiah* was 'the best music' in the eyes of nineteenth-century Englishmen. The significance of an early reference to *Messiah* in the context of Lovedale and Healdtown derives from the central role played by these institutions in the formation of this black African elite. If *Messiah* was well known here, then it had established a base in the most influential segment of black South African society.

The Lovedale Annual Reports included accounts of the activities of all the different departments and societies at the institution, among them a Literary Society. The activities of this staff/student society were more wide-ranging than its title might suggest. In addition to lectures and debates on a wide range of topics, musical items were a regular feature. The Report covering the year 1885 lists the following as an

event which the Literary Society organised on 4 December: ‘Musical Evening – “Selections from Handel’s *Messiah*.” – HEALDTOWN CHOIR’ (Lovedale Missionary Institution, 1886: 43, archival source). There is nothing beyond this bare statement, but it does at least tell us that some twenty years after ‘Hallelujah’ had been performed by a choir of black singers in Grahamstown, Healdtown had a choir (and probably soloists from within the choir) able to perform a whole programme of items from *Messiah*.

A tenuous link can in fact be made between these two early performances, via the figure of Christopher Birkett. All we know about him from Radloff’s account is that he was a teacher, involved in some way in ‘Native education’, who was active in Grahamstown in 1863 but then moved on to other towns in the Eastern Cape. Without any further information, one might be tempted to view him as a sort of lone pioneer, an exceptional individual whose activities primarily represent his personal commitment to the solfa system: Radloff in fact refers to his ‘quite extraordinary devotion to his self-appointed cause’ (1969: 11). Leslie Hewson’s research on Healdtown, however, provides a clearer explanation for Birkett’s presence in Grahamstown, and his connection with Healdtown itself.

In 1855 two teachers were brought to South Africa to teach at Day Schools attached to Healdtown, ‘by an arrangement between [William] Shaw and the then Governor, Sir George Cathcart, who agreed to pay passage money and provide a salary of £175’ (Hewson, 1959: 159). One of these teachers was Christopher Birkett. Both teachers had been trained in the principles of the Westminster Training College in London, itself strongly influenced by the ‘Training System’ developed by David Stow in Scotland. One of the emphases of Stow’s ‘remarkably progressive’ system, as Hewson describes it, was ‘frequent singing’ (ibid: 180a). While William Shaw was greatly impressed by Birkett’s work at Grahamstown, the superintendent minister at Healdtown, John Ayliff, seems to have been less impressed by that of George Rose, making an entry in the Journal of the Institution to the effect that he could see little progress during the first year of the trial of the system, and commenting that ‘too much time appears to be spent in singing and play’ (ibid: 158). Hewson states that at the end of the year ‘an exchange was effected between Mr Rose of Healdtown and Mr Birkett of Grahamstown’, and this confirms Birkett’s presence at Healdtown, as does a reference in the programme of a ‘Tonic Sol-fa Jubilee Celebration’ concert, given in Grahamstown in 1892, which describes Birkett as ‘Grahamstown’s first and last real teacher of the Sol-fa method’ and comments that ‘at Grahamstown, Cradock, Healdtown – wherever he went – there he planted Sol-fa, and there it took root and grew’ (quoted in Radloff, 1969: 8).

Despite Ayliff’s preference for a more ‘Spartan’ approach, as Hewson calls it (ibid: 159), the link with Westminster continued, to the extent that in the 1870s Healdtown was being thought of as the local equivalent of Westminster (ibid: 264, 274), with singing one of its notable features. When an inspector of education visited Healdtown in 1872 he

remarked specially on the singing. With the exception of the infants, all the children were taught singing, and great credit was due to Mr Baker for the manner in which they acquitted themselves.

(ibid: 254).

It is therefore quite possible that the work done by Rose and Birkett in the mid-to-late 1850s had provided the foundation for a tradition of singing and the formation of an Institution Choir which learned sections from *Messiah*. Since we know that Birkett later taught 'Hallelujah' to his Grahamstown singers, it is entirely possible that he also taught it while he was at Healdtown, and that successive generations of singers (and teachers) kept it in the repertoire from that time, thereby providing an initial familiarity with Handel's music which could serve, in due course, as the basis for learning further sections of the work.

Evidence that *Messiah* remained part of the Healdtown Choir's repertoire over many years is provided by occasional later references to it. For example, *The South African Methodist* (1890: 7) reported a concert at Healdtown in 1890 which included selections from *Messiah*. As late as 1948, only a few years before the Bantu Education Act cast its shadow over the great era of the mission institutions, Healdtown's touring choir sang the 'Hallelujah' Chorus at a concert in the Feathermarket Hall in Port Elizabeth, accompanied on the organ by Robert Selley (Gory, 1987: 226).

At the time of the 1885 Musical Evening mentioned above, Healdtown seems to have been somewhat ahead of Lovedale in terms of formal choir singing of the kind that could produce a performance of *Messiah*. This may well be because of the greater emphasis placed on music at Healdtown from an earlier period, the result both of the educational philosophy already mentioned and the importance given to hymn-singing within the Methodist tradition, dating back to the Wesleys themselves. At Lovedale, formal instruction in music at several levels was introduced, but much later than at Healdtown: the institution's paper *The Kaffir Express* records it as one of the 'new efforts' of the year 1871 (quoted in Olwage, 2003: 50). In addition to the Literary Society's Musical Evenings, there was of course singing in the church services.

These varied musical activities in the missionary institutions served several purposes within the broader Christianizing and civilizing mission. Lovedale's paper (now renamed *The Christian Express*) noted in 1910 how 'active participation impresses the memory more than passive participation. The words of the hymns will linger in the scholar's memory longer than those of sermons' (quoted in Detterbeck, 2002: 141). The singing of Western music with Christian words could help to distance converts from the (musical and other) practices of the surrounding African society. Musical activities were also an integral part of wider disciplinary initiatives to keep students occupied and therefore away from all kinds of undesirable influences. Victorian concerns about the proper use of leisure time, previously discussed (see above: 83), were present here too. Detterbeck, drawing on the work of A. Vilakazi, asserts that all missionaries and mission stations upheld the dignity of labour and condemned laziness. This work ethic naturally had a strong effect on their teaching programmes, and it was not only the working hours of their converts that concerned them.

(ibid: 177)

Seen in the light of these concerns and initiatives, the training of a choir to sing *Messiah* clearly had much to recommend it. It was European music, and therefore automatically 'civilized', but its civilizing potential was greatly enhanced by the fact that its words came directly from the Bible and conveyed the central Christian

message. In Victorian England, *Messiah* was quite specifically regarded as having a beneficial moral and spiritual effect. In 1894 Frederick J. Crowest declared it ‘the most powerful of all civilizing agencies’, because its music ‘has probably done more to convince thousands of mankind that there is a God about us than all the theological works ever written’ (quoted in R. M. Myers, 1948: 238). This would clearly have recommended it to missionary activities in South Africa also. Finally, being a large-scale composition including passages of polyphonic complexity, the preparation of *Messiah* would inevitably occupy much time and require much hard work (as Masiza’s singers found).

While Lovedale had certainly made the acquaintance of *Messiah* by 1885, through the performance by the Healdtown Choir, there is no mention in the Lovedale Annual Reports of an Institution Choir there until the turn of the century. This does not absolutely prove that one did not exist, but it does suggest that if there was such a choir its status was not equivalent to that of the Healdtown Choir. In the Report covering the year 1899, mention is made in the Literary Society’s section of a ‘Musical evening, arranged for by the Choir’ (Lovedale Missionary Institution, 1900: 67, archival source). By 1909, the Institution Choir warranted its own section in the Report (Lovedale Missionary Institution, 1910: 96-7, archival source). A suggestion that *Messiah* became part of its repertoire at this time comes from the Xhosa composer Benjamin Tyamzashe, who was a student at Lovedale between 1905 and 1909. According to Deirdre Hansen, who bases her account on his own reminiscences, ‘Tyamzashe vividly recalls the choir’s performance of the Hallelujah chorus from Handel’s “Messiah”, conducted by the Rev. John Lennox’ (1968: 10).

However, at this point it is worth examining a number of available pieces of evidence rather carefully, because at some time before 1910, a development took place at Lovedale which may well have been the single most significant factor in establishing the familiarity of ‘Hallelujah’ in the African community of South Africa. The most important clue is a single sentence in the Report on the year 1910: ‘The whole school combined as usual in the rendering of the ‘Hallelujah Chorus’ (Lovedale Missionary Institution, 1911: 47, archival source). This means that for at least the previous couple of years, ‘Hallelujah’ had been taught to a very large number of students, not just the choir. The statement is made under the heading ‘Training in Choral Singing’, a section of the Report written by Mr A. Germond, who can therefore be assumed to have been in charge of the training. He begins by saying ‘The Normal Classes met for the usual mass singing practices’. The term ‘Normal Classes’ almost certainly refers to the classes in the Teacher Training Department of Lovedale. What is meant, then, by ‘the whole school’? All the students at Lovedale? The Report for 1911 is more specific: ‘... the Practising and Normal Schools, making a total of over 350 voices, combined in the singing of the Hallelujah Chorus’ (Lovedale Missionary Institution, 1912: 67, archival source). A reasonable conclusion would be that it was the same combination in the previous years: the classes of teachers in training, and the classes of the school at which they did their teaching practice.

The likelihood that Tyamzashe is remembering these mass choral singing events, rather than a performance by the Choir as such, is reinforced by a mention in the Report for 1909 of the conductor remembered by Tyamzashe: ‘The Rev. John Lennox kindly took all the Normal Classes in Vocal Music’ (Lovedale Missionary Institution, 1910: 35, archival source). This would presumably have included the mass singing

practices. There is no mention of his having conducted the Choir. Perhaps Tyamzashe wasn't concerned to distinguish exactly which group had sung 'Hallelujah' or perhaps Hansen simply assumed that he was referring to the choir. The 'Lovedale Choir' at this time seems to have been, in effect, the Church Choir. The General section of the Report on the year 1909 states: 'The choir, under the leadership of Mr Mocher, rendered valuable service. The duties of organist were shared by Mrs Smith, Miss Brown and Mr Facer' (ibid: 19). This is clearly describing the activities in the church. That the 'choir' mentioned there and the 'Institution Choir' are one and the same is confirmed by Mocher's name as the author of the section of the Report headed 'Institution Choir', and the thanks expressed in that section to the same three people just mentioned as playing the organ (ibid: 96). The 'Institution Choir' section of the Report on the activities of 1910, this time written by Germond, specifically mentions that 'thanks are due to the members for their regular assistance in leading the singing at Divine Service' (Lovedale Missionary Institution, 1911: 94, archival source). Nevertheless, the choir, which numbered between 30 and 40 members at this time, did tackle oratorio excerpts (Germond mentions that in 1910 choruses from *Elijah* were amongst the items the choir studied), so it is quite possible that they also sang 'Hallelujah', perhaps before the practice developed of teaching it to the larger group, perhaps alongside it.

From all of this it is clear that *Messiah* had become well established at both Lovedale and Healdtown by the first decade of the twentieth century. The performances by the Healdtown Choir (which included enough of the work to sustain an entire programme) would of course have made it familiar not only to the choir members themselves, but also to most of the other Healdtown students, as well as introducing it to those at Lovedale and probably more widely in the surrounding communities as well. In terms of its wide dissemination throughout South Africa's black community, however, it is the inclusion of the 'Hallelujah' Chorus as an item in the mass singing at Lovedale that seems particularly significant, as this would have given large numbers of students the level of familiarity that only comes with first-hand experience of performance.

It is not, however, simply a matter of numbers, but also of the social prominence gained by graduates of Lovedale and Healdtown. The Eastern Cape was both 'the earliest and most successful field of missionary endeavour in southern Africa, and the region which produced the largest number of Africans with the best educational qualifications' (Willan, 1984: 29). Lovedale and Healdtown were thus at the centre of the process of mission education which 'was steadily producing an emergent African middle-class elite' (Maylam, 1986: 71). The new opportunities which opened up in the fields of politics, journalism, education and the church allowed the members of this 'nascent petty bourgeois class' (ibid: 108) to wield considerable influence in their communities.

It is particularly their roles in the last two fields – education and the church – that seem likely to have been decisive in promoting *Messiah* to its position of prominence in the African choral tradition. From Lovedale and Healdtown people went out to take up positions in schools and churches not only in the Eastern Cape but all over South Africa, and especially (as we shall see) in the newly developing mining centres to the north. In many instances they would have been influential in the formation or direction of choirs in schools and churches, and among the items introduced to these

choirs would inevitably have been those which had been learnt at the missionary institutions. *Messiah* (or at least the 'Hallelujah' Chorus) would surely have had pride of place, given its unquestioned status within English culture, and its embodiment of the Christian message, both of which were crucial elements in the identity of the emerging African elite.

Through its performance at a meeting of the Lovedale Literary Society, *Messiah* was quite literally inserted into a context which, as Isabel Hofmeyr notes, provided an important forum both for defining the interests of this new elite and preparing them for future leadership roles. She quotes a Lovedale alumnus as stating that the Society 'prepared students for life after school and taught them how to be "cultured"' (2004: 125). Questions of what constituted 'progress' and 'civilization' were common topics of debate at meetings of the society, and it seems likely that these terms would have constituted one of the frames of reference within which *Messiah* would have been placed.

Another would have been the all-encompassing discourse of missionary Christianity. It is not recorded what items from *Messiah* were presented by the Healdtown Choir in 1885, but in the context of a presentation to the Literary Society, it is possible that some explanation might have been given of the overall plan of the work. In any case, as more of the work became familiar to mission-educated Africans over the years, it seems likely that 'Hallelujah' (so often sung as the concluding item) would have assumed particular significance when understood as a resolution of the preceding struggle between God and his Christ and the worldly forces opposed to them. Drawing on the work of Hayden White, Leon de Kock has analyzed, in the missionary discourse of Lovedale during this period, the consistent presence of a 'dualistically conceived prefiguration of the world as a (metaphorical) battleground of good and evil' (1996: 82), this basic dualism being accompanied by subsidiary metaphoric oppositions such as dark and light, civilized and barbarian, heathen and Christian, which we have already encountered in different contexts. De Kock points out the emphasis given in this discourse to 'comedic resolutions, as these rely on a resolution of warring opposites characterised by binary metaphoric description' (ibid). If 'Hallelujah' was understood as a representation of the victory of God over the kings and kingdoms of this world, it would inevitably have participated also in reinforcing the other oppositions mentioned. The extent to which they were in fact accepted by African students will be considered further below (see: 156ff).

Some sense of the central place this music had come to occupy, and its significance from the point of view of the missionaries themselves, can be gained from a comment made by Miss J.W. Coombs, who after retiring from the position of Superintendent of the Girls' Schools at Lovedale in 1922, had in an honorary capacity been doing 'itinerating work' by car, all over South Africa. Her task was to maintain contact with past students of Lovedale, in order to help and encourage them. In her report for the year 1925 she focuses particularly on the need to strengthen Lovedale's 'scattered children', quoting the words of a township man – 'We are in a big fight with all sorts of evil' – and of a young woman in a small centre – 'I find the world a place of sorrow and temptation' (Lovedale Missionary Institution, 1926: 73, archival source). What is interesting in the present context is the image she chooses to set against this depressing picture of life beyond the confines of the institution:

We remember the students of many years gathered in the Large Hall singing the Hallelujah Chorus, in praise of the 'Lord of Lords and King of Kings'. Some of them are needing to be told to lift their eyes again and see the King in His beauty; the One who is able to save and to meet all the needs of their present lives.

(ibid)

If a similar image was at all active in the minds of the past students themselves, it must have been a powerful incitement to the performance of 'Hallelujah' in a variety of new situations, wherever circumstances permitted it. It does seem that many students looked back with nostalgia to their time at Lovedale. De Kock (1996: 70) comments on the 'aura' acquired by the institution and its graduates in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. According to D.D.T. Jabavu, his father, John Tengo Jabavu, 'was immensely benefited by the subtle glamour of the Lovedale environment' in his younger days, and often remarked that 'those were the happiest days of his life' (quoted by De Kock, *ibid*). De Kock refers to correspondence from 'school' Africans that expresses a strong feeling of warmth and gratitude, often conveying a sense of pride in the institution (*ibid*: 100). Jonathan Hyslop found that this was true of mission education more generally, at least till the 1930s, and in many places into the early 1950s. He recognizes the inevitability of distorting influences on memory, but the numerous good recollections of their schools and their teachers which he quotes from mission pupils are nevertheless significant (1999: 8-9). Alan Cobley refers to the way the missionary institutions, often imitating the ethos of the British public school, used student associations as part of their process of socialization, and suggests that 'loyalty to the school and the dedication to preserve school "traditions" thus engendered among graduates of the leading "Native Institutions" could become part of a distinctive and exclusive class identity in a very direct way' (1990: 77).

It might therefore not have required the explicit prompting of Miss Coombs for many of the past students of the missionary institutions to feel a desire to recreate, in new and often difficult situations, whatever they could of their earlier life, in a process not unlike that adopted by the British settlers. In this case also, performances of *Messiah* would have been favoured by a number of factors. In the first place, the 'Hallelujah' Chorus at least would have been comfortingly familiar, in environments which often seemed alien and hostile to the values that had been inculcated at the institutions. Then, as Miss Coombs suggested, for those who responded positively to its musical qualities it could provide an image of beauty and inspiration to be set against those aspects of their new environments that appeared ugly or dispiriting. Its text not only directs attention to the God on whom the students had been taught to rely, but also reassures them of his power and ultimate victory, and the music lends support to this by its own powerful and confident qualities. Again, its unquestioned status commended it to their strongly developed sense of what was required for the demonstration of progress in civilization. Connected to this, as the mission-educated elite established themselves in new urban settings, *Messiah* also began to make a contribution to their developing identity as a distinct group occupying a position of leadership. This will be discussed further in connection with the growth of the *Messiah* tradition in the townships of Johannesburg (see below: 162)

By suggesting how *Messiah* may have become attached to students' positive memories of their time in the missionary institutions, I do not intend to deny the

negative aspects of their experience. Graham Duncan's analysis of Lovedale as a 'total institution' proposes that 'public displays of uniformity, contentment and peace were a façade which concealed deep discontent with the regime at Lovedale' (2003: 302). In his view, the 'mystical ethos' surrounding Lovedale was an effect of total institutionalization (ibid: 332), and the deeper reality is found in the various forms of resistance which surfaced in the first part of the twentieth century, 'which, when considered together, demonstrate the oppressive nature of the educational system at Lovedale' (ibid: 302). However, the account given by Z.K. Matthews, a student at Lovedale in the second decade of the twentieth century, suggests a thoroughly ambivalent experience rather than a fundamentally negative one concealed behind a deceptively positive mask:

Through Lovedale's gates one passed into the wonderland of education, the same kind of education, we thought, which had given the European his all-conquering power Here was the school from which some of the teachers whom I had regarded with awe had come Here I was among boys and young men who had come from all parts of the country in search of the same treasure, an education that would move us ahead in the world into which Europeans had thrust us

(Matthews, 1981: 33)

He acknowledges that 'the instruction we received was superior to anything I had ever known before' and that 'some of our teachers, like Mr Chalmers, had a profound sense of mission and devotion to their work, and this too you felt in contact with them' (ibid: 37). At the same time, he notes the development of 'a certain resentment at the notion that if a thing was going to be good, it had to have a European associated with it' (ibid: 36):

In my memories of those days, the pleasures and satisfactions stand stoutly in their place beside the discoveries, slowly accumulating at the same time, of what it meant to be a black man in a white man's world It would not be a simple matter to try to expose and dissect the complicated and often subtle and un verbalized mental and emotional state of the young Africans who comprised the student body of Lovedale. No man can live for long in a regime in which his inferiority is assumed without building up powerful resentments.

(ibid: 42)

A recognition of this ambivalence is crucial for an understanding of *Messiah's* trajectory in the African community. It characterizes not only Matthews's response to Lovedale, but much more generally the response of the African elite to European Christian culture. Leon de Kock uses the concept of ambivalence to interpret texts produced by Africans who had studied at Lovedale in the late nineteenth century. De Kock is concerned to counter such negative judgements on the African elite as that of David Chanaiwa (in turn based on the ideas of Albert Memmi and Aimé Césaire), who describes the elite as 'unduly naïve, self-deceiving and even otherworldly' (quoted by De Kock: 114). Within this perspective, the African elite's adoption of, and subsequent attachment to, *Messiah* could be seen (and dismissed) as a sign of their passive and ultimately self-defeating subjection to colonialist values. De Kock opens a space for a more positive assessment by arguing that beneath their supposed conformity was the possibility of 'subtle and subversive self-assertion within the constraints of the available language' (ibid). Like the discourse of 'civilization' that surrounded it, *Messiah* could be 'reappropriated and redeployed'.

Drawing on Homi Bhabha's identification of ambivalence as being 'at the heart of colonialist discourse', De Kock focuses on the representative figures of Elijah Makiwane and John Tengo Jabavu, 'model' products of missionary education who at the time of the Healdtown Choir's performance in 1885 were, respectively, president of the Native Educational Association and editor of the independent African newspaper *Imvo*. De Kock's analysis of their writings shows how, in their struggle for recognition and political representation, they consistently call on 'the very founding principles of the missionary-colonial enterprise: equality, freedom, and justice for all humankind in the eyes of God' (ibid: 124). In view of what has been said earlier about the connections between *Messiah* and the British monarchy (see above: 138) their frequent invocation of the figure of the Queen is of special interest. Makiwane refers to

that Great Gracious and Noble Queen, who has been one of the greatest blessings of the present age, a Queen who is not only the Queen of England, but who in a sense may be said to be the Queen of Queens.

(quoted by De Kock: 121)

The following statement by Jabavu shows clearly that expressions of devotion to the monarch by no means entailed an uncritical acceptance of the entire colonial-imperial enterprise:

The rejoicings of our countrymen over the Jubilee of the Queen have been genuine, although the doings of those who in this country act in the Queen's name have, on this Jubilee year, served the purposes of a wet blanket to their enthusiasm. Yet we rejoice to think that our people are now able to discriminate between the local politician who is the troubler of the natives' peace of mind, and the Sovereign whom they have learned to love and appreciate because she can, in every sense of the expression, 'do no wrong'.

(quoted by De Kock: 132)

Having noted the 'extraordinary ambivalence' of the whole passage from which this is taken, De Kock comments: 'The Queen as the legitimating signifier for empire was useful to Africans because its promise of freedom, justice and citizenship created the terms for a counter-discourse in the colonial milieu' (ibid). The authority of the 'King of Kings' praised in the 'Hallelujah' Chorus could similarly call to account the actual colonial authorities with whom Jabavu and his ilk had to contend.

The following conclusion by De Kock is important in the present context:

One can assert that missionary discourse – exemplified here by the case of Lovedale and its influential teachings – was effective to a considerable extent in shaping new *modalities* of subjectivity among the 'school' elite. Such modalities, like the *forms* of missionary discourse, allowed for contestation within constraining terms of reference already set by the project of a civilising colonialism.

(ibid: 102, italics in original)

Adapting this formulation somewhat, *Messiah* too can be understood as a constraining 'form' within which there was room for the African converts to respond in ways that did not simply accept the totality of what was presented to them, but rather understood and applied it in ways that the representatives of the civilizing mission might not have foreseen or approved. If the basic meanings of *Messiah* derived from its associations with European culture, Christianity and (in this era) the British monarchy, then its valuation was open to the ambivalent, even contradictory currents that flowed through the responses to these institutions by the African elite. *Messiah* could certainly have

been assimilated into the generally cautious, conservative, accommodationist stance which has been seen as the result of the Christian influence (Maylam, 1986: 109), perhaps best illustrated here in the case of Peter Masiza. However, in the absence of specific statements concerning *Messiah* on particular occasions during this period, this attitude cannot simply be assumed. Given the possibility of a 'subversive subservience', as described by De Kock, *Messiah* could also have been placed on the side of the *ideals* professed by the previously-mentioned institutions, for the purpose of opposing their corruption by actually existing colonial conditions. Which of these possibilities was realized on a given occasion would have depended, as always, on the positions adopted by those who presented and heard the music.

Although the earliest records of *Messiah* come from Lovedale and Healdtown, brief mention should be made of one other missionary institution, the American Board Mission at Amanzimtoti in Natal (later known as Adams College), which Markus Detterbeck (2002) used as the case study for his discussion of mission music education. Evidence of *Messiah*'s presence at Adams College is significant for two reasons. One is simply the general prominence of its past students and staff amongst the African elite, notable examples being Albert Luthuli, president of the ANC and Nobel Peace Prize winner, and Z.K. Matthews, whom we have already met in the context of Lovedale. Matthews was the first African to obtain a BA degree and, as a leading member of the ANC, was later involved in the drafting of the Freedom Charter. He went from Lovedale to Adams as headmaster of the High School. The connection of both Matthews and Luthuli with occasions on which items from *Messiah* were performed will be noted below. A second and more specific reason for mentioning Adams College is the importance given to music education there. People associated with the institution emerge as key figures in the later development of the *Messiah* tradition in the Johannesburg townships, outstanding examples being Mark Radebe (see below: 168) and Khabi Mngoma (see Chapters 14 and 16).

The earliest references to *Messiah* at Adams College in Detterbeck's account come from the 1930s. He mentions a concert presented 'in 1933 to celebrate the progress of the institution' at which the 'Hallelujah' Chorus and various other pieces from *Messiah* were performed (2002: 361). His original source, a report in the Adams College periodical *Iso Lomuzi*, shows that although the report appeared in 1933, the date of the concert was in fact December 3, 1932, and it seems that what was being celebrated was specifically the opening of a new building. Quite typically, however, the writer places this within a narrative of progress, not only of the institution itself (the report is headed 'Progress at Amanzimtoti Institute', and reference is made to 'the remarkable forward strides which have been taken') but also of the African people as a whole. Referring to the opening of an earlier building, the writer suggests that

even some Missionaries did not think the erection of such a building was justified, the opinion being that Natives had not advanced enough to warrant such expansion. Such opinions have been completely refuted by results.

(*Iso Lomuzi*, 1933: 20)

The 'Hallelujah' Chorus was sung at the opening ceremony itself, along with a couple of other pieces, by 'the students'. It is not clear whether this was a choir or a larger body of students, but the conductor was none other than Albert Luthuli. This was an

ideal opportunity for 'Hallelujah' to fulfil its customary role of simultaneously celebrating and demonstrating the progress to which attention was being drawn.

A concert was then given in the evening by 'the Staff and a few students', which the writer describes as 'of a very high order, altogether different to what are known as Native concerts elsewhere'. This too seems to imply a scale of valuation, now specifically musical, along which progress is being made. It was in this programme that the other *Messiah* excerpts appeared (ibid: 21). There were two choruses ('And the glory of the Lord' and 'Worthy is the Lamb') and two solos ('Every valley' and 'He shall feed his flock'). The last of these (in which the soprano voice follows the alto) was sung by the wives of two of the staff members, Rev. O.B. Githens and Z.K. Matthews. This item from *Messiah*, 'shared' in a very literal sense, may be taken as a small symbol of the cooperation between black and white which characterised the whole programme, a theme to which I shall return (see below: 164).

A few months later, in July 1933, the Fifteenth Annual Conference of the Natal Native Teachers' Union was held in Durban, with Z.K. Matthews as President and Albert Luthuli as General Secretary (*Native Teachers' Journal*, 1933: 20). On the third evening, 'a grand concert was staged by the teachers' (ibid: 23). Several local choirs were amongst the contributors to the programme, but the only choral items mentioned by name in the report are once again 'And the glory of the Lord' and 'Worthy is the Lamb', sung by the choir of Adams College. This provides an example of *Messiah* moving beyond the immediate context of the missionary institution itself, though still performed by the institution's choir, into the broader context of the teaching profession, the members of which were in a privileged position for carrying Handel's music into the wider black African community. They did this not only through their involvement with school choirs and teachers' choirs as such, but also through their participation in a wide range of social and cultural organizations. This can be illustrated through a specific example from the apparently unlikely context of sport. A year after the conference just mentioned, the Durban and Districts Bantu Lawn Tennis Association held a social evening at which members provided the entertainment. Two of the clubs had choirs which contributed items. The choir of the Winter Roses Lawn Tennis Club, which consisted entirely of teachers, sang the 'Hallelujah' Chorus (*Ilanga*, 1934).

Another comment by the writer of the report on the Teachers' Union Conference illustrates how *Messiah* was beginning to be seen not simply as the work that occupied the highest place in the world of music, but rather as representing a specific category – 'classical' music – defined primarily in terms of its difference from more popular forms, and increasingly standing in opposition to them: 'In this concert jazz music was banned, and most of the music was of a classical and polished order' (ibid). This too is a theme to which will occupy us as we follow *Messiah* beyond the confines of the missionary institutions.

There could be no more suggestive way of concluding this chapter on the missionary institutions than by quoting an item that appeared in the Adams College periodical at the same time as the report on the Teachers' conference was published. It proposes a status for *Messiah* at the institution far beyond that of simply being one item amongst others in the repertoire of the choir:

We read in our English newspapers that, in some parts of Yorkshire, the people sing the Hallelujah Chorus from Handel's "Messiah" as a community song. Could we not equal that at Adams? An ideal to live up to, at any rate.

(quoted in Detterbeck, 2002: 361)

Whether or not this aspiration was realized at Adams, over the next few decades 'Hallelujah' did indeed become a kind of community song for so many people in the African community that one of my informants could describe it as 'sort of a national anthem, a signature tune' (M. Masote interview, 2000). It is clear that the missionary institutions played a vital role in the early stages of the process by which this occurred.

CHAPTER 11: Into the townships

Alan Cobley points out that 'mission-educated Africans were among the earliest settlers in the new industrial towns of Kimberley and Johannesburg' (1990: 66). At a very early stage, they began to establish 'exclusive or semi-exclusive social and cultural networks', because these 'meant mutual support in a new environment and promoted their cohesion as a social group' (ibid: 68). One of the ways in which they could meet and express common interests and a common identity was through a variety of cultural associations:

It was in this way that many of the earliest African debating societies, literary societies, choral groups and sporting clubs to appear outside the 'native institutions' were founded in urban areas in the 1890s and 1900s.

(ibid: 69)

I shall argue, through the details of the cases discussed in the following sections, that it was through this social process that *Messiah* was established beyond the confines of missionary education, giving it the potential to signify membership of this elite social stratum, and providing them with a vehicle for the expression of the values with which they identified and which in turn identified them.

The Abantu-Batho Musical Association

Many of those who had been educated at Lovedale and Healdtown were unable to find suitable employment in the Eastern Cape, and therefore from the 1870s onwards made their way to Kimberley, South Africa's first industrial community,

in search of jobs commensurate with their ambitions and aspirations. The Mfengu in particular, close adherents of the missionary cause, and relatively recent immigrants in any case to the Eastern Cape, proved most adept at exploiting the opportunities for employment that the diamond fields provided; they more than anybody were prepared to make a permanent home in this new industrial environment.

(Willan, 1984: 29)

If, as I have suggested, the Eastern Cape missionary institutions played a crucial role in establishing *Messiah* amongst the African elite, it might be expected that Kimberley's community of mission-educated Africans would be one of the first groups outside the institutions to form a choir with the ability and the wish to perform choruses from *Messiah*. The first records that I was able to find of such an 'independent' African choir, not directly associated with a missionary institution, school or church, do indeed come from Kimberley. The choir in question is the Abantu-Batho Musical Association, described in an article published in 1948 as 'the oldest established musical association in the country, having been founded about twenty five years ago' (*World*, 1948b). This would suggest that it began around 1923, but it was already in existence four years earlier when a review of one of its concerts appeared in the *Diamond Fields Advertiser* (*DFA*, 1919), and this is the date given in the note about its conductor, Hamilton Masiza, which precedes one of his compositions in the collection *South Africa Sings* (Khumalo, 1998: 22). Masiza was one of those who had come to Kimberley from the Eastern Cape. His father was a

Methodist minister, and according to the *African Yearly Register* his education had included periods at both Lovedale and Healdtown (Skota, 1931: 187). As we have seen, this would very likely have provided him with an introduction to *Messiah*, if he had not already received it from his parents, who were also music lovers (Khumalo, 1998: 22). A more immediate influence, however, was A.H. Ashworth, conductor of the Kimberley Musical Association and Abantu-Batho's 'Chief Patron' who 'did much to help the Association to develop on right lines' (*World*, 1948b). According to Khumalo, Masiza modelled Abantu-Batho on the KMA. The latter was a typical English oratorio choir of the period, and *Messiah*, unsurprisingly, was in its repertoire at the time when Abantu-Batho was formed (Snyman, 1984: 87).

Messiah clearly became an important part of Abantu-Batho's repertoire also. The 'Hallelujah' Chorus was sung at one of its first concerts, the reviewer noting that it was 'a popular number, being excellently suited to a well-trained native choir' (*DFA*, 1919). The 1948 'anniversary' article's only reference to repertoire suggests that *Messiah* was significantly associated with the choir in the minds of those who remembered its performances: 'Some of the most difficult oratorios including the "Messiah" were always well rendered and presented in the various Churches at Sacred Concerts' (*World*, 1948b). It was not only the local community of Kimberley that heard their performances: 'The choir visited several towns in the Orange Free State and the Cape, but the most enthusiastic audiences were on the Rand where packed houses greeted them' (*ibid*). On one such occasion, in December 1932, the choir presented two concerts in Johannesburg, the second of these being a Sacred Concert at the Bantu Men's Social Centre which included selections from *Messiah* as well as from *Elijah*.

In a review of this second concert, the writer comments that it 'was well attended, testifying to the enthusiasm shown by a section of the Bantu to good music' (*World*, 1932d). The term 'section' could of course just be referring to those who happened to have a particular interest, but coupled with the description 'good music' and in light of evidence from other sources, it might be seen to carry the suggestion that this is the music of a social elite defining itself through its superior musical taste. Veit Erlmann, outlining the class associations of several leisure-time activities pursued by black city dwellers, specifically mentions classical music as signalling 'the fact that a person had crossed the fine line that separated the mass of laboring poor from the thin layer of preachers, teachers and clerks that constituted South Africa's black middle class' (1996: 118). Cobley (1990: 2) characterizes the class that had emerged by the 1920s as 'a mature petty bourgeoisie'. His conceptualization is particularly helpful for understanding the important role played by this group in the South African history of *Messiah*.

By the term 'petty bourgeoisie' he means 'an intermediate class of people in a capitalist social formation' (*ibid*), specifically one poised between the two primary antagonists in the class struggle: capitalists and workers. It therefore cannot be viewed as a stable or definitive grouping, but nevertheless develops a distinctive cultural identity and consciousness, expressed through cultural forms borrowed from both the primary classes (*ibid*: 3). In South Africa, of course, this picture is complicated by the intersection of race with class identity. Cobley refers to Phil Bonner's view that the South African black petty bourgeoisie was 'a "fundamentally different creature" from a petty bourgeoisie in a developed capitalist society, being both "stunted and

repressed” by the forces of colonialism and racism’ (ibid: 9). The black petty bourgeoisie’s espousal of *Messiah* as a cultural *form* is obviously borrowed from the white bourgeoisie, and may be seen to express its ‘upward’ aspirations and its desire for acceptance on terms of equality. At the same time, I shall suggest below that the framework of *meaning* within which particular performances were set, frequently expressed a sense of what the black elite had in common with the working class below it: primarily, the experience of racial oppression.

Cobley asserts that ‘one constant element in the cultural identity of privileged black social groups and the black petty bourgeoisie which emerged from them in South Africa was the close contact they maintained with sympathetic whites’ (ibid: 88). The review of the 1919 Abantu-Batho concert in Kimberley suggests something of the way in which such a ‘sympathetic white’ might locate the performance of choral music within a discourse of African progress:

Those interested in the development of native questions had an opportunity – not the last it is to be hoped – of combining an evening’s entertainment with a useful study of present-day conditions. Many people who believe they know the natives are in some respects twenty years out of date. As regards restraint and delicacy of treatment, the music rendered on Friday shows a very great advance, and does the greatest credit on those responsible.

(DFA, 1919)

Here the discourses of ‘African progress’ and ‘inter-racial cooperation’ begin to intersect. This was a time when the ‘native question’ was coming to be seen as particularly pressing, and when efforts to reduce hostility between the races were regarded as of vital importance by at least some in the white community.

The years between these two Abantu-Batho concerts (1919 and 1932) saw the beginning of a number of initiatives aimed at promoting the perceived interests of both white liberals and the black elite (Cobley, 1990: 88-91). One was the establishment of the Joint Councils of Africans and Europeans in many of the major urban centres. This came about partly as a result of the visits of the Phelps-Stokes Commission from America, whose members had included Dr James Kwegyir Aggrey. In his autobiography Z.K. Matthews, who became a member of the Durban Joint Council, describes the impact of Aggrey’s visit:

It was he who made the greatest impression on both white and black in South Africa. Dr Aggrey held audiences spellbound. The main theme of his addresses was inter-racial harmony. His famous simile of the black and white keys being equally necessary to produce harmony from a piano fired the imagination of those who believed in inter-racial co-operation. How could this inter-racial co-operation be given practical expression in the circumstances prevailing in South Africa?

(Matthews, 1981: 87-88)

The Joint Councils were one response, addressing the issues very directly, but clearly musical events, such as performances of *Messiah* or programmes that included items from it, could also provide opportunities for ‘men and women of good will to come together’, not only in the twenties when tensions were being ‘aggravated by the rising cost of living, and increasing economic competition between poor blacks and poor whites’ (ibid: 88), but as we shall see, also in later years.

Small but nevertheless significant signs of this cooperation surround these Abantu-Batho performances. The role of A.H. Ashworth has already been mentioned. According to the above-mentioned 'anniversary' article he 'invited his friends from the Kimberley Musical Association to attend the concerts in the City Hall and elsewhere' (*World*, 1948b). At the 1932 Johannesburg concert Matthews thanked both the 'Europeans and Natives who had made the visit of the choir an enjoyable one'; and Griffiths Motsieloa, who organized the event, 'also thanked those Europeans and Natives who had supported Mr. Masiza and his company by attending the concerts in large numbers, and Mr. H. Pim who had entertained them to dinner' (*World*, 1932d).

Howard Pim's involvement confirms the potential of such events to be incorporated into broader initiatives aimed at promoting inter-racial harmony during this period. Pim was involved in the formation in 1929 of the most important body specifically concerned with this issue, the South African Institute of Race Relations (Legassick, 1976: 238). However, the report on the 1919 concert suggests some of the limitations of these initiatives. The number of whites willing to become involved was often very small, and ideas of racial superiority and segregation often remained in place: 'There were very few Europeans present, although separate space in the best part of the hall had been reserved for them' (*DFA*, 1919).

Z.K. Matthews in his vote of thanks clearly inserted the 1932 performance by Abantu-Batho into a discourse of morality and cultural upliftment, commenting that the visit of the choir was 'educative in that it gave Bantu people taste for good, edifying music. It made them want to aspire to noble efforts in life' (*World*, 1932d). This comment is reminiscent of the 'moral' discourse about music that was transferred from mid-Victorian Britain to Natal and to the missionary institutions (see above : 82). There is even a direct verbal echo of the *Natal Mercury* review previously quoted, in which the writer speaks of the music being associated with 'the noblest aspirations' (*NM*, 1867b).

It was, however, a different aspect of the discourse that became prominent in the 1920s and 1930s through the concerns of a new generation of white missionaries and philanthropists, concerns which focussed on the deprivations experienced by black urban dwellers. The phrase 'the moralizing of leisure time' has come to be associated particularly with Rev. Ray Phillips, a missionary who came to South Africa in 1918 to assist in a social welfare programme under the auspices of the American Board Mission (Detterbeck, 2002: 220). Phillips wrote not only that 'a people's character is moulded by the kind of investment made of their free time' but also that 'whoever captures the leisure time of the people, gets the people' (quoted in Coplan, 1985: 115). One of the most prominent initiatives to come from this kind of thinking was the Bantu Men's Social Centre, the venue for Abantu-Batho's sacred concert. Opened in 1924 through the efforts of white patrons (among them Howard Pim), it 'quickly became the focus of much of the recreational activity of educated Africans in Johannesburg' (Cobley, 1990: 90). In turn, this activity (which included African performances of *Messiah* both at the Centre and elsewhere in the urban areas) became a focus for the expression of a wide variety of social and political attitudes. The discourse surrounding the BMSC presents these sometimes conflicting attitudes with unusual explicitness, and therefore provides a valuable indication of the attitudinal frameworks within which performances of *Messiah* inevitably also came to be discussed and assessed.

Cobley acknowledges a genuine philanthropic impulse ‘among missionaries and white liberals to improve the recreation facilities and leisure-time activities available to blacks in towns’ (ibid: 89). Quoting Phillips’s own words, Bhekizizwe Peterson identifies one of his motivations as the desire to ‘change people and their surroundings so as to ensure “Abundant Life” as preached by Jesus, “the first great social worker”’ (2000: 121). Not only were the leisure-time activities to have value in themselves, they were also to provide an alternative to such dangerous occupations as crime and indulgence in alcohol. Many amongst the African elite clearly agreed that there were potential benefits: Peterson (ibid: 125) quotes an editorial from a black newspaper which states that ‘fortunately there are many Natives who have been quick to appreciate the worth of an institution such as the “Bantu Men’s Social Centre” is designed to be, and have pledged themselves to support the institution’. For some the Centre therefore became, alongside initiatives such as the Joint Councils and the Institute of Race Relations, a further symbol of inter-racial cooperation.

However, the BMSC was also ‘a social space politicised by white attempts to control the recreational activities of Africans’ (ibid: 124). The second of Phillips’s statements quoted above clearly suggests the potential for this. One contested issue was the extent to which whites remained in charge of the committees overseeing the running of the BMSC, some African leaders coming to regard the project as paternalist (ibid: 125). Others felt that the ideas behind the BMSC aimed to ‘produce good boys who are traitors to their peoples’ (ibid: 126). As Cobley notes, the radical political activity of the immediate post-war period had alarmed liberal whites, and some certainly did argue for the provision of recreation facilities and ‘appropriate’ leisure-time activities on the basis that these ‘would reduce the opportunities for Africans to fall prey to “agitators”’ (1990: 89) who might draw them into radical political parties or trade unionism.

This returns us to the issue of class differences within the black community itself, and their association with different forms of cultural expression. Peterson suggests that ‘the symbolic import of the BMSC was encoded in its signification of the desired “high culture” amidst the shacks and shackles of urbanisation’ (ibid). Something similar could be said of the *Messiah* performance by Abantu-Batho that took place there. As David Coplan remarks, the African middle class tried ‘to place as much social distance as possible between themselves and the *marabi* culture of the slums’ (1985: 114). Peterson argues that the very existence of elite and *marabi* culture alongside each other revealed that ‘there were sharp class differences amongst Africans’ (2000: 118). These last words are a quotation from H.I.E. Dhlomo, who emerged as a leading member of the African elite in the field of literature.

In his work on *marabi*, Christopher Ballantine has cautioned against any simple mapping of genre onto class:

Although one can discern the existence both of different class tendencies and different musical genres, the relationship between economic class and musical genre is not straightforward – competing classes might have supported the same genre, or one class might have identified with different, apparently contradictory genres.

(1993: 11)

It would clearly be an over-simplification to suggest that the culture of the African elite was exclusively based on Western models, or that the Western models in the field of music were exclusively classical. Indeed, the struggle to develop an urban culture drawing on both African and Western elements, and the parallel development of classical and Western-influenced popular forms, remained ongoing themes within elite discourse. Nevertheless, in the complex process of negotiating an identity incorporating Western and African elements (discussed in detail throughout Detterbeck's thesis (2002)), the role played by the performance of a work such as *Messiah* is its ability to signify the association of the elite with important elements of Western culture and Christianity, both of which in turn signified the possession of education. Coplan (ibid) sums up the reasons for the enormous importance given to this:

Since teachers and clerks often earned no more than drivers and labourers, their status had to depend on Western education and the exclusiveness it gave to the occupations for which it was needed. Those who overcame the obstacles to become professionals were at the top of the African social scale Education helped them gain the ear of sympathetic whites, reduced their sense of cultural inferiority, and reinforced their claims for racial equality Christian schooling also served as a basis for relationships and institutions that supported the achievement of common goals.

The Abantu-Batho Musical Association illustrates very well the way in which cultural organizations could establish and maintain social networks amongst the African elite, the significance of this in the present context being its provision of a support base through which *Messiah* could be established in the townships. Apart from the singers who met regularly for practices, the choir's performances provided opportunities for the elite to meet as audience members. These links were extended beyond the local community of Kimberley not only through the choir's visits to other centres but also through a policy of inviting guest artists from all over the country. To mention only the most famous, Z.K. Matthews (then at Adams) not only gave the vote of thanks already mentioned, but also sang at the 1932 Johannesburg concerts; and amongst the guest artists at the 1919 Kimberley concert was D.D.T. Jabavu (then at Fort Hare).

The figures associated with Abantu-Batho remind us once again of the prominence of teachers within the African elite, and their crucial role in nurturing the performance of *Messiah*. Masiza, the conductor, was a teacher; the guest artists just mentioned were teachers; the person recognized as the Founder of the Association, Mina Soga (*World*, 1948b), was also a teacher according to *The African Yearly Register* (Skota, 1931: 258). The following description by Z.K. Matthews (1981: 17) of his own teachers forms a fitting conclusion to this section because of the way in which it highlights the status accorded to teachers, suggests the reasons for this, and confirms the close links between the Eastern Cape missionary institutions and the African elite in Kimberley, where Matthews went to school:

They had been to the great schools, Lovedale, the only high school for Africans in the country, and Healdtown, one of the pioneering teacher-training schools. In the 'Location' they were regarded with immense respect They had received the best education then available to any of our people in our own homeland. They were fortunate, even exalted. They had travelled far into the world of the white man's books and knowledge Through them, I might enter that world myself, perhaps even become a teacher like them.

Teachers were equally prominent in the establishment of another important arena through which selections from *Messiah* came to be performed by many more choirs: the African eisteddfods, choral competitions and music festivals.

Eisteddfods, competitions and festivals

A comprehensive historical account of these events has yet to be written, although a start has been made by Markus Detterbeck. In the relevant chapter of his doctoral thesis he proposes that ‘formally organised choral contests in South Africa started in the early 1930s with the Transvaal Eisteddfod’ (2002: 203). An announcement for the Transvaal Bantu Eisteddfod, held in December 1931, does claim that it is ‘The First Bantu Musical Festival in South Africa’ (reproduced in Detterbeck, 2002: 204), but this seems to be an indicator of a widened scope rather than evidence that there were no formal choir competitions prior to it. Although I did not attempt to research this area myself, the material which I gathered did provide several signs of previously-existing competitions. For example, the announcement of the Abantu-Batho Musical Association’s 1932 Johannesburg concerts stated that two of their soloists were ‘medallists of the Kimberley Bantu Eisteddfod of 1930’ (*World*, 1932c). When the Wesleyan Higher Mission School Mixed Choir from East London visited Johannesburg in the same year, their advertisement stated that the choir ‘won East London Bryant Shield Choir Competition nine times in succession’ (*World*, 1932a), which (if it was an annual competition) would take us back to the early 1920s. In July 1923, under the heading ‘Capetown Choral Competition’, *Umteteli wa Bantu* carried an extensive report on a ‘musical contest between the Native Choirs of prominent denominations here in the Peninsula’ (*UWB*, 1923). While Detterbeck’s proposal might thus not literally be true, the Transvaal Bantu Eisteddfod (renamed in its second year the Transvaal African Eisteddfod) did rapidly become the largest and most widely known of these events, drawing performers from all over the country (such as the choir from East London mentioned above). Its importance for the present discussion lies firstly in the fact that *Messiah*’s most famous chorus was one of the prescribed pieces at the first Eisteddfod, and secondly in the existence of clear evidence for the socio-cultural framework within which the Eisteddfod was promoted.

Detterbeck follows David Coplan (1985: 116) in viewing the Eisteddfod as growing out of the South African Bantu Board of Music (SABBM), founded by Hamilton Masiza and another teacher, Mark Radebe. Radebe had, like Masiza, been a student at both Lovedale and Healdtown, and had later worked with Z.K. Matthews as a teacher at Adams College (Matthews, 1981: 85). These links are useful in showing Radebe’s involvement in the social and cultural circles already discussed. However, it was his name rather than that of the SABBM that became indelibly associated with the Eisteddfod. In the run-up to the second Eisteddfod, the *Bantu World* reported that its origins lay in ‘the efforts of Mr. M.S. Radebe to institute a regular musical festival which should foster Bantu musical and artistic talent’ (*World*, 1932b). In a tribute to Radebe, Walter Nhlapo stated: ‘He it was who founded the popular Transvaal African Eisteddfod which was the father of them all amongst Bantu people throughout South Africa and still the best’ (*World*, 1941d). Many years later Khabi Mngoma, who attended Radebe’s school in the 1930s, referred to him as ‘the founder of the Transvaal African Eisteddfod’ (Mngoma, 1998: 43).

Coplan regards the Eisteddfod as ‘a setting for middle-class African interaction’ which ‘sharpened definition and consciousness of their class identity’ (1985: 116). The components of that identity (and the contribution that a work such as *Messiah* might make to it) come into clearer focus when we consider the aims of the Eisteddfod and the principles on which it was based. These were succinctly set out in a letter to Howard Pim from A.B. Xuma, another leading member of the African elite, who in 1935 became vice-president of the All-African Convention and in 1940 president-general of the ANC (Saunders & Southey, 2001 [1998]: 195), and chaired the Eisteddfod committee in its early years:

The objects of our *African Eisteddfod* are:

1. To preserve and develop the individuality of African Native Music, and concurrently, to encourage the finer refinements of European music.
2. To offer inducements for the diligent study and practice of music, European and African, and kindred subjects; to bring to public notice promising musicians; to interest the African race in good music and local talent; to bind together those who love music, for the common purpose of advancement, not only in the European, but also in African music and kindred arts.

(quoted in Copley, 1990: 85)

In contrast to the discourse which typically surrounded *Messiah* in the earlier mission contexts, this clearly illustrates ‘the refusal of the new breed of African intellectuals of the early twentieth century to view their “Africanness” in a wholly negative way’ (ibid: 82). Now African music is persistently set alongside European music as a worthy object of study and development.

This development has marked the structure of African choral competitions to the present day: there is always the expectation that ‘Western’ music will be performed alongside ‘African’ music. Detterbeck (2002: 273) has described the ‘sectionalized repertoire’ in terms of three categories:

Amakwaya repertoire today characteristically consists of neo-traditional songs, which are modernised versions of songs taken from African folk repertoire, Western art music, mainly of European origin, and finally African choral works by mission-trained composers, which are eclectic in form and incorporate African and Western elements to differing degrees.

He sees these as a sign of negotiation between various identities, suggesting that the first category shows the African middle class’s ‘desire to remain true to their ancestral roots’, the second ‘their continued aspirations towards a “modern” way of life’, and the third an attempt to reconcile the other two (ibid: 275).

Copley describes the new identity of the African petty bourgeoisie that was emerging by the 1930s as ‘essentially “inclusive”’ (1990: 83), and points out that several of their formal cultural associations had ‘the declared aim of combining the best features of African and European civilisation to develop a new “progressive” African culture’ (ibid: 85). He quotes a statement made in evidence to the Native Economic Commission in 1931 by J.R. Rathebe: ‘We can take the best from the European and the best from the Native, and build up a unique civilisation.’ Rathebe was also on the organizing committee for the first Transvaal Eisteddfod, as was H.I.E. Dhlomo, whose important position as a proponent of a ‘New African’ identity has been discussed by Tim Couzens in his biography of Dhlomo (1985).

Given this context, it comes as no surprise that the 'Hallelujah' Chorus was one of the pieces prescribed for the first Eisteddfod, appearing in the category for adult mixed choirs (Detterbeck, 2002: 205). On one level, the organizers were only formalizing a role the piece had long played: providing proof of ability. This difficult and prestigious chorus would provide a test for the skills of the competing choirs and their conductors, but in terms of the context from which those choirs came, winning the competition would have a broader significance, constructed in the terms of a previously-established discourse. It would demonstrate achievement not only in the field of music, but also in Western Christian civilization. This in turn would indicate not only the capabilities of the individual conductor and choir but also of the various overlapping groups to which they belonged. However, a changed context meant a shift in these meanings. While 'Hallelujah' still signified an identification with European Christian culture, and an acceptance of its value, this no longer entailed the wholesale rejection of the culture that had preceded its arrival at the southern tip of Africa. Rather, it represented one component of an identity that was at this time emerging with a new explicitness. General agreement could be expected that 'Hallelujah' was an example of 'the best from the European civilisation'. But while the missionaries would undoubtedly have seen it in stark opposition to what they regarded as the undesirable African indigenous music, and would have intended that it should permanently displace the latter, it now took its place alongside that music as part of a more inclusive cultural consciousness.

The Transvaal African Eisteddfod undoubtedly gave a new impetus to large-scale choral competitions. Teachers' associations, the biggest black professional associations during the first half of the twentieth century, became particularly prominent in promoting these competitions. The Transvaal African Teachers' Association (TATA) later took over the running of the provincial eisteddfod, which became known as the TATA Eisteddfod, but there were many others. Alan Cobley (1990: 78) notes that 'the members who constituted such associations were already an elite in educational and economic terms', given the 'highly limited opportunities for Africans to acquire professional qualifications or professional status'. Thus the teachers' associations 'quickly developed into a means of common social expression' for the elite. Through its role in choral competitions, this elite group continued to provide not only mechanisms of institutional support through which *Messiah* could flourish, but also the social context in which its value was maintained and its meanings constructed.

Another important development was the establishment of the Johannesburg Bantu Music Festival (JBMF) in 1947. This was an initiative of the Non-European Affairs Department (NEAD) of the Johannesburg Municipality, and can be seen as continuing a number of themes discussed already: white liberal concerns for the welfare of urban blacks, attempts to promote inter-racial cooperation, and the desire to channel the use of leisure time away from activities that might prove disruptive to the social or political order. David Coplan states that it soon became 'the most important national black cultural event of the year', and attributes its initial success 'to the good will and good relationships between white civic officials and leading blacks' (1985: 169). It was disturbed by the same kind of accusations that had been levelled at the BMSC (which was in fact one of the venues used for the JBMF events) – the attempt by whites to remain in control, to impose their criteria and divert Africans' attention from

more pressing issues – but the assessment made by Coplan that from about 1956 ‘middle-class Africans lost interest in the festival’ (ibid: 170) is too sweeping, at least as regards choral activities. P.J. Nhlapo and Sibongile Khumalo, also basing their account largely on that of Coplan, are even more dismissive: ‘Nothing created by the undemocratic regime can last long in the townships. And the JBMF sang its swansong after a short life’ (Nhlapo & Khumalo, 1993: n.p.). In fact, according to Khabi Mngoma the JBMF continued for nearly thirty years, until 1975 (Detterbeck, 2002: 228, n. 133), albeit with somewhat fluctuating fortunes. Mngoma himself, one of the ‘middle-class cultural leaders’ Coplan (1985: 169) depicts as having become disillusioned with the festival, continued as its Secretary from 1949 until 1964 (Mngoma CV, 1993, archival source).

The expectation of variety and innovation in the syllabi for competitions inevitably meant that the same pieces could hardly be prescribed year after year for the same competition. *Messiah* choruses nevertheless maintained a significant presence in the syllabi. For example, ‘And the glory of the Lord’ was prescribed at the second JBMF in 1948 in the category for Church Choirs (10-40 voices) (*World*, 1948a), again in 1952 in the category Sacred Music (Adults only, 10-40 voices) (*World*, 1952a), and again in 1963 in the category Open Sacred Music (Johannesburg Bantu Music Festival, 1963, archival source). ‘Worthy is the Lamb’ appeared at the 1950 TATA Provincial Eisteddfod in Pretoria (*World*, 1950c) and again at the 1953 South African Inter-Provincial Bantu National Eisteddfod held in Maseru, in a category called the ‘S.A. Special Music Main Trophy’ (*World*, 1952d). At this same competition, ‘Hallelujah’ was prescribed for the ‘S.A. Music Challenge Cup’.

Because of their difficulty and the requirement of four-part singing, *Messiah* choruses were prescribed more often for adult choirs than for school choirs, but from time to time secondary school choirs were put through their paces in one chorus or another. ‘And the glory of the Lord’ was set for the 1952 TATA Eisteddfod in the category for ‘Secondary Schools (Mixed Voices), English’ (ibid), and ‘Lift up your heads, O ye gates’ for the Secondary Schools’ category at the 1953 Provincial Eisteddfod organized by the Transvaal African Teachers’ Union (TATU) which in 1950 had split from TATA (*World*, 1952f). Because of their fame, *Messiah* choruses (especially ‘Hallelujah’) were available in a variety of arrangements which made them more accessible to school choirs. The writer of an article about the 1940 Border Bantu Eisteddfod, having pointed out that ‘the tradition of making boys with “unbroken” voices sing bass has strewn the country with spoilt voices that once showed promise’, advises that ‘no school loses prestige by singing a three part piece’ and goes on to note that ‘the Hallelujah Chorus out of the *Messiah*’ has been arranged in this way ‘and is not easier to sing well because of that’ (*World*, 1940a).

Although it could not continue to appear indefinitely as a prescribed piece, ‘Hallelujah’ regularly reappeared where new initiatives were undertaken in contexts related to the festivals. These events attest to the continuing popularity and status of the chorus. In April 1949 the JBMF Festival Committee organised a ‘Gramophone Recital of Choir Music’, aimed at ‘teachers, singers and others who like good choir music’ (*World*, 1949a). The programme was described as consisting of ‘folk songs, carols and anthems, including the famous Hallelujah Chorus by Handel’ (the only piece and composer identified by name). In September of the same year it was on the programme at what appears to have been a demonstration concert, organized to assist

those preparing the Western pieces for the forthcoming JBMF. According to the writer of a report on the event, 'prescribed works for the 1949 Bantu Music Festival Competitions ... were performed by the St. George's Presbyterian Church Choir under Drummond Bell, A.R.C.M., at the Odin Theatre, Sophiatown' (*World*, 1949c). Ten choral items are mentioned, four of which are from *Messiah*. 'Hallelujah' does not seem to have been prescribed in any of the JBMF competition categories in this year, but it did feature prominently at what was announced as the 'highlight of the great music festival', the 'grand opening at the Wembley Stadium on Sunday, October 2, when a mass choir of one thousand conducted by Mr. John Connell, Music Director of the City of Johannesburg, performs' (*World*, 1949b). In fact, according to a report of the event, the mass choir sang in typical fashion an 'English' piece and two 'vernacular' pieces, as well as what is described as 'the Zulu national Anthem "Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika"' (*World*, 1949d). 'Hallelujah' was the English piece, and the only one conducted by Connell.

Three years later 'Hallelujah' appeared at another new venture by the JBMF committee. According to a review in the *Bantu World* (1952b), they 'established yet another record in the musical history of the Golden City when they sponsored the first African choral concert in the City Hall last Sunday afternoon' (20 April). For this important occasion, 'Hallelujah' again provided not only a fitting conclusion but also a convenient vehicle through which the choirs could perform together with each other as well as with the organ and the City Engineer's Brass Band that also took part in the programme. As clearly as in the discourse that surrounded performances by British settlers a hundred years previously, the writer of the review constructs the event as a milestone in a narrative of progress for the community. Apart from the fact that it was the first time African choirs had performed in the City Hall, a further mark of that progress might be seen in the fact that on this occasion it was not Connell but an African conductor, Mr Z. Mbalu, who led the massed choir in 'Hallelujah'.

CHAPTER 12: 'We have made some progress' – the first complete performance

The previous chapters have outlined the interrelated institutional bases which supported the spread of *Messiah* amongst the African elite: missionary education; school, church and community choirs; eisteddfods, festivals and competitions. Through all of these, a fair proportion of *Messiah* became familiar to African conductors, singers, and audiences, fostering a climate in which complete performances might be possible (because the requisite skills had been built up) and desired (because of the high esteem in which the individual items were already held).

It seems to be generally agreed that the first complete performance took place in Johannesburg, or in one of its satellite townships, but different sources provide different ideas as to when it took place and who was involved. Following one source or another, I have had to consider possible dates ranging from 1954 back to 'the late thirties', and claims made on behalf of all the following groups: the Jabavu Choristers, the Chiawelo Community Centre Choir, the People's High School Choral Society, the Orlando Music Society, the Johannesburg African Choral Society, and the Bantu Philharmonic Society.

The source which suggests the earliest date is an article that appeared in *Bantu World* in 1954, written by a man who had been commenting on social and musical events for many years, Walter Nhlapo. His theme in this article is the importance of involving Africans in performing and listening to Western classical music, and part of his argument is to establish that they have developed the capacity for such involvement. In a later context (see below: 185) I shall return to this article and its illustration of the continuing salience of the theme of 'progress in civilization' (it includes the declaration that the African 'is fast becoming civilized'). Its more immediate relevance here lies in one of the pieces of evidence that Nhlapo adduces in support of his affirmation that 'the African has developed a profound and penetrating musical mind'. He refers to a 'Bantu Philharmonic Society which in the late thirties presented the whole *Messiah*' (*World*, 1954e).

Searching for evidence of this performance, I was able to find references to a 'Philharmonic Society' in the Western Township as early as 1934 (see *World* 1934a, 1934b) and in 1937 to a 'Western Native Township Philharmonic Choir', almost certainly the same group (*World*, 1937a), but there is no sign of a complete *Messiah* performance. Since cultural events regarded as significant were fully and prominently advertised and reported in the *Bantu World*, a *Messiah* performance is unlikely to have been overlooked (either by the newspaper itself or my search of it). There were, however, two items concerning this choir that may have some bearing on Nhlapo's statement. In one, the writer begins by noting that 'Sacred Concerts are rapidly becoming popular of late', and goes on to describe the Philharmonic Choir as 'pioneers of such entertainments specially in the Western Areas of the City' (*World*, 1939). It seems very likely that the choir would have included items from *Messiah* in such programmes, and perhaps Nhlapo was remembering this. The second item announced a plan on the part of the conductor of the choir (here called John Muthle although elsewhere his first name appears as Joseph), 'to put across some time this

year [1937] a musical enterprise, a sacred cantata – Esther the beautiful Queen by William B. Bradbury' (ibid). According to a comment made a couple of years later (in an article by Walter Nhlapo himself), this enterprise 'failed', although it is not clear whether this means that the piece was never performed or whether the performance was not successful (*World*, 1940b). Probably the implication is that the performance was not well supported, since Nhlapo begins his article as follows: 'Choral music amongst the adults in this city seems to fail; not itself but the people. The reason is, classics and drama, art and music are complicated for the average man'. Where *Esther* might fail, however, *Messiah* had a number of advantages that made it much more likely to succeed: its status, the familiarity of at least some of its items, and its embodiment of the central message of Christianity.

The context for Nhlapo's comment about *Esther* was the announcement of the formation of a new choir in Western Native Township by Owen Mlisa, and it is here that the first clear evidence appears of plans for a complete *Messiah* performance: 'With this choral group he intends staging "The Messiah" in December, which, should it materialise, will be a great achievement as the Philharmonic Choir which failed staging "Esther"' (*World*, 1940b). Had the Philharmonic Choir performed *Messiah*, Nhlapo would surely have referred to this rather than to the failed performance of a different work. The fact that he introduces *Esther* as his point of comparison suggests that it was his only previous memory of a black choir attempting to present a complete large-scale work. My feeling is that, writing over a decade later, Nhlapo remembered Mlisa's performance of *Messiah* but gave the name of the earlier group, which probably had sung excerpts from *Messiah* and had also made what was perhaps the first attempt at a large-scale work.

Owen Mlisa is yet another teacher who plays an important role in *Messiah*'s South African history. A profile in the *Bantu World* tells that he 'began his singing career as far back as 1915' in the Port Elizabeth Native Male Voice Choir, and in 1925 founded a Students' Male Voice Choir at St Matthew's College in the Eastern Cape (*World*, 1935). He subsequently became headmaster of the Salvation Army School in the Western Native Township of Johannesburg (*World*, 1937b) and organizing secretary of the first school choir singing competition arranged by TATA (*World*, 1937c). One of the people I interviewed, Urbaniah Mothopeng, mentioned his name when I asked if she could recall the first time she encountered *Messiah*. She said it was in the mid-30s, when Mlisa taught some of the choruses to a group of young people, drawn from various schools, who came together for rehearsals at the Inchcape Hall in Polly Street, Johannesburg. She said she was only in the choir for a short time before leaving to go to college, but she could clearly remember the two *Messiah* choruses the group worked on while she was with them: 'Hallelujah', and 'Glory to God' (Mothopeng interview, 2000). This suggests the background of activity out of which a complete *Messiah* performance could have grown.

According to a later summary of its activities, Mlisa founded the new choir, the Johannesburg African Choral Society (JACS), on 1 September 1940, and its initial membership consisted of thirteen women and five men (*World*, 1941j). The planned performance of *Messiah* did indeed materialise, taking place on 2 December at the same Inchcape Hall remembered by Urbaniah Mothopeng (also known at the time as the Ritz Hall). This means that the choir had only three months in which to prepare the performance. It is thus perhaps not surprising that Walter Nhlapo found certain

shortcomings, although he calls it 'a good effort as a beginning, especially as the work itself is complex' (*World*, 1940c). His remarks are very general ('in certain items there was a fall to a lower level due to lack of long practice'), the only specific comment being about the size of the choir: 'for the group to be excellent, they will have to augment the choir to many voices'. Regarding the soloists (presumably all from within the choir) he says that 'they gave a pleasing performance but the road on which they have to travel to be outstanding is distant'. There is no mention of what accompaniment was used (probably a piano) or of which items were included.

His main concern, however, is the fact that the performance took place at all. In a 'Review of 1940' which appeared shortly afterwards, Nhlapo lists a number of events which he feels are worthy of mention as having stood out during the year (*World*, 1941a). The only musical event to be included is the performance of *Messiah*, which he says was 'presented for the first time by Bantus' (further confirmation that his later reference to the 'Bantu Philharmonic' was incorrect). In a way that calls to mind an apparently distant world (one populated by the British settlers of the Eastern Cape and Natal in the mid-nineteenth century), Nhlapo presents this as a significant milestone in the life of the community. His framing comments also place it quite specifically within a narrative of progress: 'The horizon is darkened by war with all its lurid accompaniments but we have made some progress. Steady though it was, small as it seems, yet it was a pleasing feature.'

Messiah continues to contribute to narratives of personal as well as communal achievement, particularly through the positive valuation of those who are pioneers. The writer of 'An Appreciation' of the performance praises Owen Mlisa for his 'courage and daring, for this was the first show of its kind to be seen in the city' (*World*, 1940d). The performance certainly helped to establish a reputation for Mlisa and the choir. A short item in the *Bantu World* states that Mlisa has 'received many letters of congratulations from people all over the country for his successful production of the "Messiah"' (*World*, 1941b). A couple of months later a report refers to the 'Johannesburg African Choral Society of Handel Messiah fame' (*World*, 1941f).

All of this implicitly reaffirms the status of *Messiah* itself, but *Messiah*'s location at the apex of an artistic hierarchy is also quite explicit in the discourse, in a manner entirely familiar from nineteenth-century Britain. Both Nhlapo and the writer of 'An Appreciation' place *Messiah* within an evaluative framework that contrasts it with music they consider to be of lesser worth. The latter states:

Mr Owen Mlisa ... deserves the thanks of all true lovers of art It speaks well of Mr Mlisa that he took this bold step knowing that his efforts would meet with criticism and indifference from a larger section of our people who only enjoy cheap music and lighter form [sic] of entertainment.

(*World* 1940d)

Nhlapo expresses the opinion that even a flawed performance of *Messiah* such as this 'surpasses by far the sum total of all vaudeville shows presented in the city for the year', and states that 'the poor attendance of Bantus ... shows how low our musical tastes are. If it were a revue or vaudeville the hall would have been packed to applause [sic] nothing' (*World*, 1940c). For these writers musical choices not only define social groups ('all true lovers of art' vs. 'a larger section of our people') but also associate

them with a scale of value ('surpasses by far', 'how low our tastes are'). *Messiah* defines a cultural as well as a social elite.

Although the JACS had been formed (and presumably trained, at least in part) by Mlisa, it was conducted at the performance by Margaret Crallan. A later report on the activities of the choir thanks her for assisting 'in preparation of the Programme to the extent of conducting the Choir' (*World* 1941e). The use of the phrase 'in preparation' suggests that her involvement went beyond simply coming in at the last moment as a guest conductor. Perhaps the choir felt that in undertaking this venture they should consult someone with the relevant knowledge and experience. On the face of it this seems reasonable enough, if it was simply a matter of advising on specific aspects of a full *Messiah* performance. However, given the socio-political context in which it took place, Crallan's role had the potential for being generalized in a way that could make it complicit with white paternalism.

Remarks addressed by Mlisa to the audience do little to allay this suspicion. After thanking the audience for attending the concert, he is reported as saying 'to the approval of the house, "we present *Messiah* to show European how little we know and how much enthusiastic we are to learn from him"' (*World*, 1940c). It is difficult to know to what extent this can be taken at face value, although some significant contextual light is provided by noting the presence at the concert of several important figures who can be taken as representative of trends in the wider community.

One such figure is Professor R.F.A. Hoernlé, a patron of the JACS, who made a speech on this occasion. Hoernlé was at this time president of the South African Institute of Race Relations, following Howard Pim (Rich, 1993: 42), so his participation might be expected in an initiative which involved the cooperation of 'a number of Europeans and Africans' as patrons (*World*, 1941j). Paul Rich describes him as

a major figure in the intellectual formulation of modern South African liberalism. His ideas helped define the aims of the generation of liberals that emerged in South African politics during the inter-war years. They also continued to exert a considerable influence on later political thinking long after his death in 1943.

(ibid: 40)

His role, like that of white liberals more generally, has been subject to differing assessments. Radical historians influenced by Marxism emphasize the link between liberalism and industrialization in these years, suggesting that the primary aim of the liberals was the social control of Africans in a situation where fully proletarianized black labour might pose a threat to existing social and economic structures (D. Duncan, 1990: 475-6). Recognizing the cogency and persuasiveness of these arguments, David Duncan nevertheless aims to open some space for a more sympathetic acknowledgment of the simultaneous presence of different motivations and intentions. He quotes a passage from Hoernlé's book *Race and Reason* which begins to suggest how Hoernlé might have viewed the *Messiah* performance: 'To free human beings from whatever stands in the way of their realizing the best that their nature is capable of – that is, in general, the aim of the liberal spirit.' Here indeed were a group of people striving to realize one aspect of their potential: their primary aim was 'developing and encouraging classical music amongst Africans' (*World*, 1940c). Duncan contends that Hoernlé 'was positive about the prospects for

assimilating Africans to Western culture, and believed this had been deliberately retarded by “poverty, lack of opportunity, lack of encouragement, artificial barriers erected by whites” (1990: 476-7). In view of this, it is significant that what Nhlapo notes about his speech are precisely his ‘words of encouragement’ and the way he brought to light ‘the setbacks against Bantu artists’ (*World*, 1940c). This strongly implies that he approached the *Messiah* performance in terms of the broader framework of ideas summarized by Duncan.

However, Duncan also repeatedly describes his outlook as ‘paternalist’. For example, in his role as chair of the Alexandra Health Committee, Hoernlé ‘took the standard paternalist line that in dealings with the white political community, a white man should do the talking’ (1990: 487). He felt that because of his position and expertise on African affairs he was in the best position to influence the authorities. Ultimately, however, it was this failure to promote African organizations and leadership that undermined his efforts. It is therefore the broader context rather than the specific intentions of any of the participants that produces an uneasy symbolism in the *Messiah* performance: ultimately, Crallan knows best and is in charge.

Duncan points out that to the extent that Hoernlé did consult African opinion, he focused his attention on the middle class (in the case of Alexandra, the property-owning class as represented by the standholders) (ibid: 488). At the *Messiah* performance, too, he would have felt at home amongst the predominantly middle-class African supporters of choral music, both performers and audience. Although Duncan notes that many of the African elite were ‘caught in the same net of ambiguities’ as Hoernlé (1990: 493), this by no means implies that their general outlook was the same as his in all respects. The names of several of them are listed by Nhlapo as being ‘among those present’ (*World*, 1940c), and two of these names are sufficiently well known for us to be able to contrast their outlook with that of Hoernlé. Their presence complicates any attempt to read the performance simply as an example of the way in which Africans succumbed to paternalism.

Rev. Samuel Samson Tema was in fact a strong advocate of independent African initiatives. Initially qualified as a teacher, Tema was ordained in 1938 as a minister in the Dutch Reformed Church, with Orlando as his first appointment (Verwey, 1995: 241). He chaired the Johannesburg branch of the Inter-Denominational African Ministers’ Association, which Alan Cobley (1991: 364) characterizes as

a highly significant grouping because it provided a forum in which African clergy from both the general mission and independent churches could meet and discuss their aspirations and their differences without reference to white missionaries.

According to Cobley, Tema believed that ‘the impact of social, political, and racial conditions in South Africa on black Christians had combined to nurture separatism as an expression of cultural nationalism’. He favoured a united African church as an alternative to the separatist movements. Although he later worked for the independence of the non-white Dutch Reformed Mission Church (significantly proposing the name ‘Dutch Reformed Church in Africa’ for it), he also ‘cherished the ideal that one day only one DRC would exist in South Africa’ (Verwey, 1995: 242-3).

This willingness to work within interracial structures while at the same time being committed to African self-determination was also characteristic of the other well-

known figure mentioned by Nhlapo, Paul Mosaka, who in fact made a speech at the beginning of the *Messiah* performance, outlining the aims of the JACS and mentioning the 'untiring assistance and cooperation of the patrons' (*World*, 1940c). Born in Johannesburg, Mosaka had been educated at Healdtown and Fort Hare. Like Tema he started out as a teacher, but later went into business (Verwey, 1995: 184-5). Initially aligned with the ANC, in 1943 he formed the African Democratic Party, which according to Peter Walshe (1970: 349) 'explicitly rejected any reliance on European liberals' (as did the ANC Youth League that was formed shortly afterwards). At the time of the *Messiah* performance Mosaka had recently become the first African from the Transvaal to acquire the B.A. degree from a South African university (Verwey, 1995: 185). Nhlapo is careful in his review to add the letters 'B.A.' after Mosaka's name in the two places he is mentioned, indicating the rarity of this achievement and the distinction it conferred. In 1939 Mosaka was one of four prominent African Methodists who issued a statement (widely publicized and tabled for discussion at the ANC conference) arguing that South Africa's policy of segregation and the growth of 'race consciousness' among Africans made a 'purely African Church' a 'natural and legitimate aspiration' (Cobley, 1991: 364). It should be a united church that overcame the denominational divisions that were one source of weakness. This conforms to the wider acceptance by conservative African leaders at the time that whites and blacks might 'develop on their own lines, socially and culturally', as the delegates to the All-Africa Convention of 1935 expressed it, although ultimately they sought a common political identity (Saunders, 1994 [1988]: 339).

As always, then, a range of diverse socio-political positions impinges on the possible constructions of this *Messiah* performance. The paternalistic framework within which it might be placed on the strength of Hoernlé's attendance is countered by that of Tema and Mosaka, who clearly favoured independent African initiatives and may indeed have regarded the Johannesburg *African* Choral Society in such terms (the name itself now taking on an added resonance), with Crallan being seen as a facilitator rather than the dominant force behind the performance. Indeed, in the discourse surrounding the performance it is consistently Mlisa as 'founder-organizer' of the choir who receives most of the credit.

Nevertheless, it is undoubtedly true that Tema and Mosaka represented the more moderate side of African political leadership, those who up till this time had sought to claim recognition for their hard-won middle-class status and achievement of 'civilization', and who maintained friendly contact with whites through a variety of institutions (Davenport & Saunders, 2000 [1977]: 362-3; Saunders, 1994 [1988]: 339, 363). The *Messiah* performance might well have seemed to them another opportunity to continue such contact and reinforce such claims, but this whole world of ideas was to be subjected to severe pressure in the decade that followed. The next couple of years in the political career of Mosaka provide a convenient illustration of this.

In 1942 Mosaka was elected to the Natives' Representative Council (NRC) (Walshe, 1970: 271). At that time it was the only remaining 'legal' channel through which African opposition to the government could be expressed (Saunders, 1994 [1988]: 340). By participating in this body (on which Z.K. Matthews also sat) Mosaka was continuing the approach which the elite had adopted over the previous decades in the hope of persuading the government to deal fairly with the political, social and

economic aspirations of the African population. In practice, as Paul Maylam notes, 'the NRC turned out to be little more than a forum for the expression of African opinion and articulation of African grievances. Its resolutions were constantly ignored by the government' (1986: 167). Mosaka's increasing frustration with the ineffectiveness of the NRC is suggested by Matthews' report of the occasion when the NRC chair (the Secretary for Native Affairs) ordered Mosaka to sit down because of 'the tenor of his speech' (Matthews, 1981: 140-1). This frustration came to a head in 1946, when the government refused to allow the NRC even to discuss the African miners' strike (Maylam, 1986: 167). Mosaka was then provoked to use his best-remembered phrase, comparing the NRC with a 'toy telephone' (Verwey, 1995: 185). After this the NRC 'adjourned itself indefinitely and faded into near oblivion before its final abolition in 1951 (Maylam, 1986: 167).

The fate of the NRC could have been the fate of *Messiah* in the African townships, but it was not. Particular aspects of the context within which its significance had previously been constructed were coming to an end, but *Messiah* turned out not to be indissolubly wedded to them. Like Christianity and the culture of Europe more generally, it could be rearticulated with new concerns, perform new roles and gather a new range of meanings. Before turning to performances that took place in contexts which provided it with a new set of associations, I would like to consider a second performance of *Messiah* given by the JACS a few months after the first one, because this allows us to focus less on how the socio-political context may have informed constructions of the performance's significance, and more on how it was actually constructed by Walter Nhlapo in the columns of *Bantu World*.

In January 1941, Mlisa announced plans for the activities of the JACS for that year (*World*, 1941c). *Messiah* was to be presented again at the end of the year in 'a series of recitals'. First, however, they would tackle music by 'Bantu Composers', Gilbert and Sullivan's *Trial by Jury* and Coleridge-Taylor's *Hiawatha*. The plan already shows, in embryo, the idea of an annual performance of *Messiah*, with a variety of other works being performed at other times of the year. If the other works were in fact attempted, there is no report of their being performed in public. Instead, *Messiah* is announced again for 13 April, at the same venue, but this time with the choir 'augmented to full strength' (*World*, 1941e). On this occasion we know that there was piano accompaniment, played by Hope Khumalo (*World*, 1941i), well known in previous years as pianist for the Jazz Maniacs (C. Ballantine, 1993: 47). There were some changes to the soloists, but Crallan was once again to conduct (*World*, 1941h). In the event, however, Crallan was 'absent' (no reason is given) and Mlisa conducted (*World*, 1941i). He thus became, as far as I have been able to determine, the first African conductor of a complete *Messiah* performance in South Africa. Nhlapo once again gives no details about the actual performance, apart from saying that the audience was 'highly entertained and enraptured by the singers as they interpreted with deep earnestness the chorus [sic] and arias' (ibid). The significance of the performance this time is constructed primarily in terms of the work itself: 'Its lovely music and tender story of composition are enough to make classical music lovers attend every presentation.'

In the various items by Nhlapo that appeared in the columns of *Bantu World* before and after this performance, *Messiah* is represented in terms of three interrelated discourses, which are not simply descriptive but specifically evaluative. The first is a

'high art' discourse. On one occasion Nhlapo describes it as 'a masterpiece which fascinates' (*World*, 1941e), on another as 'one of the world's musical masterpieces' (*World*, 1941g). Its intrinsic aesthetic quality, then, recommends it to the whole world, not just to a particular country or group. It is therefore worthy of the attention of Africans in South Africa also.

The second discourse is one of 'popularity': Nhlapo says that it 'appeals to and is appreciated by initiated and uninitiated alike' (*World*, 1941e). Presumably his intention is not only to give added status to *Messiah* by suggesting the size of its appreciative audience, but also to persuade potential listeners that there need be no barrier to their attendance at the forthcoming concert. A different context thus elicits a claim that is somewhat in tension with the statements discussed above which construct a group of listeners (the majority) whose taste is at too low a level to appreciate *Messiah*. Nhlapo seems to be claiming for *Messiah* a certain accessibility that is not shared by all classical music: the implication is that there is some classical music only appreciated by the 'initiated' (whether it be previous experience or formal education that qualifies them as such). Although all of Nhlapo's comments on *Messiah* have roots in the discourse established in England, this one is particularly clear in its echo of the motif of 'learned and unlearned' discussed above in connection with its reappearance amongst the British colonists (see above: 115). Here Nhlapo is inviting his readers to share a perspective on *Messiah* that can claim a long history and international acceptance.

The third discourse is religious. In one of his articles (*World*, 1941g), Nhlapo presents his own (somewhat apocryphal) version of the story of *Messiah*'s composition. This retelling seems to be serving several purposes, which are mutually reinforcing: to encourage people to attend the forthcoming performance, to deepen their understanding of the music they are to hear, and to strengthen their Christian faith. Nhlapo calls the story 'miraculous', and as he tells it, there are two related aspects to the 'miracle' which took place after Handel had received the libretto from Jennens: he was healed of the disease which had brought him near to death, and he was able to compose *Messiah* 'in one magnificent week of effort'. Both these events are, according to Nhlapo, the result of faith. 'His utter unbounded faith in the Almighty enabled him to break the fetters of disease' and his compositional effort was 'sustained only by his faith (faith is the victory that overcomes the world)'. When *Messiah* was complete, 'with downcast eyes, he was man enough to admit the inspiration was not his. "I think God has visited me" was his only comment.' *Messiah* thus appears as a work of divine inspiration, confirmed by an instance of divine healing. For Christians (provided this story is accepted, as it clearly is here), there can be no doubting *Messiah*'s supreme value, since it has the approval not just of human authorities but of the ultimate authority.

Nhlapo's emphasis on the Christian character of *Messiah* provides an opportunity to reflect on its continued (indeed, as we shall see, increasing) prominence in the musical life of the townships, as well as on its changing meanings. Here as elsewhere, the two aspects are interdependent. *Messiah*'s link to Christianity could have been a liability in a political climate which saw the emergence, particularly in the ANC Youth League, of a new radicalism. That it turned out not to be so was at least partly because Christianity was able to develop new emphases that fitted it for its changed context. Along with these changed emphases went a new set of associations for *Messiah*. Peter

Walshe (1970) has traced in detail the various ideological currents that flowed through the ANC at this time, including the persistent though altered influence of Christianity, and I draw largely on his account in what follows.

Events such as those surrounding the demise of the NRC were accompanied by an increased level of cynicism regarding 'claims that South Africa's political and economic order was conditioned by the Christian morality of the white harbingers of Western civilisation' (Walshe, 1970: 341). This did not, however, 'necessarily involve the rejection of Christianity':

Many congressmen retained a strong inclination to moralise on the basis of Christian ethics, an inclination which therefore *survived the transition* from reliance on a moral regeneration of society to acceptance of the need for determined and mass political organisation.

(ibid: 345, italics added)

Walshe cites several examples of the 'tendency to identify African emancipation with the application of Christian justice', one of which is a poem by Walter Nhlapo himself (ibid: 341-2), which illustrates his participation in the broader debates of the time. While members of the Youth League 'were less inclined than their elders to argue from an assumption of Christian morality', several of its leaders nevertheless 'retained their Christian faith as a source of continued respect for the human rights of all individuals and as quite compatible with their form of nationalism' (ibid: 342). When the first President of the Youth League, Anton Lembede, died in 1947, A.P. Mda argued that one of the great lessons Lembede had bequeathed to the League was 'the value of religion, especially the Christian religion, in the life of individuals, peoples and nations'. The national liberation struggle must, he continued, be 'strengthened by an unflinching faith in the Almighty God' (quoted by Walshe: 342-3). This faith is exactly what Nhlapo attributes to Handel, and what he sees embodied in the composition of *Messiah*. A performance of *Messiah* could thus become an affirmation of this faith, and in that way contribute to strengthening the liberation struggle.

This concept of the righteousness of the struggle was supported by African ministers, many of whom were members of the ANC. Rev. James Calata was both a leading figure in the African Ministers' Federation and ANC Secretary-General from 1936 to 1949. In a 1943 address Calata spoke of the need for Congress to

adopt Christianity and follow Christ as our national leader. In that way we shall be led to realise that the only kingdom which, if accepted by the nations, will save the world from future wars, is the Kingdom of God.

(quoted by Walshe: 345)

In 1950 Calata signed a statement on behalf of the African Ministers' Federation reminding their people that 'in the legitimate struggle for political and social justice, they should not "forget Christ who is the Champion of Freedom"' (ibid: 346). If this is how Christ is understood, it is not at all far-fetched to suggest that *Messiah* would have been understood accordingly. 'Christ' is, after all, simply the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word 'Messiah', and the Old Testament prophecies of a coming 'messiah' had imagined a figure 'who would deliver Israel from all its troubles and oppression' (Woodhead, 2004: 16). This understanding of the *Messiah/Messiah* would become ever more significant as an increasingly determined Nationalist government faced an increasingly determined African liberation movement.

PART 4: THE 'AFRICAN' MESSIAH 2

CHAPTER 13: A brief orchestral introduction – Joseph Traunck and Lucas Makhema

The aspect of *Messiah* performance which best symbolizes the inequality between 'town' and 'township' in terms of available resources is the orchestral accompaniment – or lack of it. While the largest South African cities had professional orchestras, and the white population in many smaller towns could bring together enough musicians to form amateur orchestras, no township had an orchestra until the 1960s. Brass bands and jazz bands might supply a variety of wind instruments, but *Messiah*'s accompaniments rely primarily on a body of strings, and in the townships string players were notable only by their absence. The flourishing African choral tradition therefore relied on keyboard instruments, or had to make do without accompaniment. For choirs that had extended their knowledge of *Messiah* beyond the 'Hallelujah' Chorus, there was no opportunity to gain the fuller experience of performing the work with an orchestra. At the very moment when this might have seemed a natural development, it faced a more formidable obstacle than ever before.

Victory in the elections of 1948 enabled the National Party to begin the implementation of the policy of apartheid (literally, 'apartness', 'separation') which it had adopted in the early 1940s. As opposed to the tentative proposals for reducing racial segregation that had been put forward by the Smuts government, the declared aim of the Nationalists was to extend it, 'to make it more comprehensive, apply it more rigorously, and broaden its application' (Saunders & Southey, 2001 [1998]: 12). This meant there was little immediate prospect for the growth of a non-racial society, in which the racialized separation of choir and orchestra might be overcome. There were two possible ways in which African choirs might access orchestral accompaniment for *Messiah*. Both would entail the goodwill and cooperation of those people in the white community who did have access to the requisite skills and resources. A short-term option might be for an African choir to sing together with an existing white orchestra. A longer-term solution would be to train people from the townships so that they gained the skills necessary to form their own orchestra. The mid-1950s saw a brief realization of the first of these possibilities; the second had to wait until the next decade.

Few township residents had even heard an orchestra (except on recordings) before the Johannesburg Symphony Orchestra visited Sophiatown in October 1944. This was claimed at the time to be 'the first symphony concert ... ever to be given in an African township' (*World*, 1944). The JSO was an amateur orchestra that had been formed in 1934. It had played a leading role in presenting concerts of orchestral music in Johannesburg before this function was taken over first by the Johannesburg City Orchestra and then by the SABC Orchestra, when these were organized on a full-time professional basis in 1946 and 1954 respectively (Wolpowitz, 1984b: 26-29). The JSO then shifted its focus towards giving concerts at schools, clubs and institutions (R. W.

Ballantine, 1984: 52), with a particular emphasis on bringing symphonic music to young people, and people in Johannesburg's African townships.

The founder and conductor of the JSO was Joseph Traunek, an Austrian who came to South Africa as a refugee from Hitler's Germany (Wolpowitz, 1986: 380) and whose life is the subject of research currently being undertaken by Pamela Tancsik. I am grateful to Dr Tancsik for giving me a copy of the conference paper in which she presented her initial findings (2007). I draw on this in what follows, as the broader socio-historical contexts of Traunek's experience can contribute significantly to our understanding of the *Messiah* performances which I am about to discuss. Traunek's mother and wife were Jewish, and Tancsik's account provides details of his encounters with Nazi racial ideology, which in one case led to suspension from his post as musical director at the State Theatre in Rudolstadt. These experiences might well have been a factor predisposing him to oppose the racial policies of South Africa's Nationalist government, and might have fuelled his involvement in the musical life of the townships.

My own research has unearthed details which supplement Tancsik's account by providing further evidence of just how extensive this involvement was. It may be significant, in view of what has been suggested above, that the 1944 Sophiatown concert which Traunek conducted was arranged by an organization calling itself 'the Campaign for Right and Justice' (*World*, 1944). A year after this concert, Traunek was involved in setting up the Musical Society in the township of Orlando (*World*, 1945). In May of the following year, a report on a symphony concert given by the JSO at St Cyprian's Primary School in Sophiatown stated that 'Mr. Traunek has gone to great pains to bring this type of music to the African people, and is still as keen as ever' (*World*, 1946a). In November he 'addressed a huge audience in the Odin Theatre, Sophiatown, on the inauguration of a Musical Society in Sophiatown similar to that at Orlando' (*World*, 1946e). On this occasion, there was another speaker, destined to become far more famous than Traunek as a result of his stand against apartheid: Trevor Huddleston, a priest who had been sent to South Africa in 1943 by the Anglican Community of the Resurrection to take charge of its missions in Sophiatown and Orlando (McGrandle, 2004: 47).

Huddleston's presence is not just an interesting but incidental historical detail. Tancsik suggests that it may in fact have been Huddleston who first invited Traunek to bring his orchestra to Sophiatown. The evidence for this is an interview which Pippa Stein conducted with Huddleston in 1986, in which he says 'I asked him [Traunek] if he would come and play and bring his whole orchestra, which was white, and he would come out on a Saturday afternoon and play in the open air.' The same interview shows that a close relationship developed between the two men: Huddleston describes Traunek as 'a marvellous musician and a most delightful person, a great friend of mine'. In due course Traunek and Huddleston would join in presenting a *Messiah* performance, together with a third figure who was making a musical name for himself in the townships: Lucas Makhema.

According to a profile published in the *Bantu World*, Makhema (originally from the Orange Free State) had been trained as a teacher at Adam's College, but gave up teaching in 1946, 'inspired by his desire to promote music among his people' (*World*, 1951b). He became the Secretary of the Johannesburg Bantu Music Festival for the

first two years of its existence, and worked with a number of choirs in the Johannesburg area. One of these was the Orlando Choristers, with whom he went to the Inter-Provincial Bantu National Eisteddfod in Bloemfontein in 1950, winning the competition for the Main Trophy, for which the prescribed piece was the 'Hallelujah' Chorus (*World*, 1950a, 1950b, 1950d). Here is evidence of a connection with *Messiah* which was to strengthen over the next couple of years. In 1952, the Jubilee Singers, conducted by Makhema, swept the boards at the JBMF by winning ten trophies and so being awarded the Champion of Champions Shield (*World*, 1952e): in one of the categories which they won, the prescribed piece was 'And the Glory of the Lord' (*World*, 1952d). In 1953, at the Inter-Provincial Bantu National Eisteddfod held in Maseru, Makhema and the Jubilee Singers won two prestigious categories in which *Messiah* choruses were prescribed (*World*, 1953b): once again the 'Hallelujah' Chorus for the 'S.A. Music Challenge Cup', and 'Worthy is the Lamb' for the 'S.A. Special Music Main Trophy' (*World*, 1952d).

It was in February the following year that the Jubilee Singers and the Johannesburg Symphony Orchestra came together to present excerpts from *Messiah* in St Mary's Anglican Cathedral, in the centre of Johannesburg. This seems a logical extension both of Trauneck's commitment to music in the townships and of Makhema's success in presenting *Messiah* choruses with his choir. *Bantu World* announced it as a 'unique concert', and both the announcement and the subsequent report emphasized that this was a first: 'probably the first [concert] of its kind in this country' (*World*, 1954a); 'the first time that the Jubilee Singers appeared under a European conductor'; 'the first time that Mr. Trauneck had conducted an orchestra with a Non-European choir' (*World*, 1954b). This constructs the significance of the concert in local as well as national terms. It was an important development in the musical activities of those involved (*World* says the Jubilee Singers 'went a stage further at the week-end in their achievements'), but also more generally in the musical life of South Africa.

The reports in the *World* and the *Rand Daily Mail* both mention that the concert was introduced with an address by Trevor Huddleston, but they highlight different aspects of what he said. In line with the comments just quoted, the *World* focuses on the idea of the development of African talent: Huddleston said 'there was a wealth of untapped talent among the non-European races of South Africa' (*World*, 1954b). His use of the word 'untapped' seems to suggest three things in this context. First, the performance demonstrated how the talents of the Jubilee Singers themselves could be brought to a new level through the opportunity to sing *Messiah* with orchestra. The fact that this had hitherto been unavailable to them meant that an important aspect of their potential as performers had been untapped. Second, the performance provided evidence of what already existed in the townships, untapped because it had not received exposure in the wider world, and therefore remained unknown and unrecognized – not only in other countries but also in South Africa's own white community. Third, the achievement of the Jubilee Singers suggested that, if given opportunities and encouragement, similar talents might be brought to life amongst those who as yet had not made any attempt to cultivate their musical talent. It remained untapped because it had yet to be discovered, and perhaps even the township residents themselves could be brought to a greater realization of the possibilities of their own communities by seeing and hearing what the Jubilee Singers were doing. In short, the concert could be seen as a notable achievement, because it involved a first collaboration between a township choir and an orchestra, and because this happened with *Messiah*, a work of acknowledged

importance. It could therefore stand as a symbol of the potential that might be released if circumstances were more favourable.

The *Rand Daily Mail* report begins with the following quotation from Huddleston's introduction: 'This is more than an ordinary sacred concert. We have a non-European choir, a European orchestra and a mixed audience, for which thank God' (*RDM*, 1954). For the writer of the report, this 'summed up the significance of the occasion'. Here the most salient point is not simply the combination of choir with orchestra, but rather the fact that one group is black and the other white. As we have seen on many previous occasions, the scale and prestige of *Messiah* means that a performance will motivate a large number of people, both performers and audience, to come together: the perceived greatness of the work creates a sense that the performance is something worth undertaking and worth attending. On this occasion, *Messiah*'s familiarity to members of both groups also provided a practical means for facilitating their cooperation. It therefore became the symbolic ground on which racial harmony could be staged. Against the idea of separation favoured by the Nationalist government, this performance brought large numbers of black and white people together with a collective purpose. It was not simply that the 'many hundreds who listened' (*ibid*) included black and white people who physically occupied the same space, though given the trajectory of government policy that was not without its own importance. The symbolism was stronger, in that the roughly equal numbers of black and white performers (the *RDM* report estimates fifty in the choir and forty in the orchestra) were visibly working together on a common project, and audibly coordinating their efforts to achieve a harmonious result. Of course, the performance could not entirely escape the constraints of actually existing social conditions: it remained true that the choir was black and the orchestra white, rather than both being mixed. Nevertheless, taken as a whole the performance clearly offered a vision of the future very different from that of the Nationalist government. It did not seek to eliminate differences – the programme included some 'unaccompanied Bantu hymns' conducted by Makhema (*ibid*) – but the particular contribution of *Messiah* was to demonstrate that there was also much that the two groups shared.

Makhema's association with *Messiah* seems to have been strengthened by this event. In May, 1954 he took the Jubilee Singers to Benoni to sing 'some of the awe-inspiring choruses of Handel's great oratorio, *The Messiah*' at a sacred concert arranged by the Benoni African Music, Art and Dramatic Society (*World*, 1954c). At the same time, *Bantu World* published a report (1954d) about Makhema's determination to 'introduce a great European tradition to Africa': 'He is working to make it possible for our singers – among the world's best – to join the European tradition of singing the "Messiah" once a year.' These comments suggest *Messiah*'s articulation with a prominent discourse amongst the African elite (clearly evident in the pages of *Bantu World*) which insisted on the desire, ability and right of Africans to associate themselves with those traditions of Europe which they found valuable.

This discourse was given a sharper edge as Nationalist policy pressed for the confinement of Africans to their 'own' sphere (an issue which I discuss further below – see: 194, 203, 221). A few months after the Cathedral performance, *World* published a thinly veiled riposte to apartheid ideology, written by Walter Nhlapo. He argues that amongst Africans there is 'a keen interest in classical music' and that access to recordings (resulting in what he dubs 'gramophonitis') has brought about

'the conversion of many Africans to a love of Western musical classics' (*World*, 1954e). He asserts that classical music 'is to them nature and sacred'. This rather strange formulation seems to imply both that they have fully assimilated it (is now 'natural' to them, not something foreign or artificial) and that they accord it the highest possible value (it is 'sacred' to them, not something they could or would easily discard). Invoking the Renaissance humanists, he maintains that 'we [Africans] fully realise that the arts are the architects and builders of civilization and a people'. If 'the standard of civilization attained by any race is justly estimated by its care and adoration of art', as he argues, then the African 'should be treated as a civilized being, irrespective of his colour or creed'.

Nhlapo is careful to anticipate the retort that African involvement in European culture must necessarily be at a lower level than that of Europeans themselves. It is at this point that music plays a crucial role in the argument, because it is here more than anywhere else that Africans have already demonstrated their abilities (which is what allows the writer of the article on Makhema to claim African singers as being 'among the world's best'). One of the pieces of evidence which Nhlapo marshals is his memory of a complete performance of *Messiah* (this reference is discussed above – see: 173). Against those Europeans who 'assume they know us best and can rate us as of less consequence or of lower intellectual stature', Nhlapo argues that African performances of classical music have shown a 'mental depth of interpretation and acuteness' along with 'imagination and a rare power of understanding' which has 'astonished artists and European music critics'. He then asks: 'Must a people who can interpret the thrilling audacity of texture, the sublime, incisive beauty embodied in classics, be denied good music?'

Makhema clearly did not think so. He wished to inhabit the European *Messiah* tradition as fully as possible, and enable others to do so. Beginning with the 'Hallelujah' Chorus, his choirs had gradually added other *Messiah* items to their repertoire, and had graduated to performing a substantial selection of choruses and solos with orchestra. The next logical step was to institute an annual performance. Its importance to him is made obvious by the extraordinary effort he was willing to put in to overcome the difficulties he faced:

It is an uphill job. The singers come and go, and the heartbreaking work of training an enormous choir in the difficult arias and choruses has to be tackled from the beginning over and over again. With the disappearing singers have gone away many of the expensive musical scores of the great oratorio and Mr. Makhema has no money to replace them. So what does he do? Does this dauntless man give up? No. He sits down and for hours every day he copies out the score by hand. He has been at it for months.

(*World*, 1954d)

If strength of commitment to *Messiah* can be taken as one measure of how well established it has become in a given community, Makhema surely reveals how deeply-rooted it had become amongst Africans in South Africa.

In a different kind of society, it might not have taken long to realize Makhema's dream of an annual *Messiah* performance. All the necessary elements were in place, including the experience of the first concert to have introduced the orchestra into the African tradition of singing it. Yet by the end of the year Makhema had left South Africa, to be followed before long by the other two people who had played key roles

in presenting that concert, Joseph Traunek and Trevor Huddleston. The departure of all three appears to have been caused, though in different ways, by the impact of racial politics on the spheres in which they were active.

Makhema was employed by the Johannesburg City Council's Non-European Affairs Department (NEAD) as a music adviser, and is still reported in August 1954 as participating in a meeting of the JBMF Committee (*World*, 1954f). His subsequent disappearance from the pages of *Bantu World* might have remained a mystery were it not for a brief reference in David Coplan's *In Township Tonight!* (1985: 170), based on an interview with Makhema conducted in 1978. According to Coplan, Makhema saw that whites were replacing blacks in the NEAD and left South Africa in 1954 to become a choirmaster in Bulawayo 'before I was booted out'. Perhaps the way had been prepared for this by his visit to Rhodesia the previous year with the Jubilee Singers, when they sang at the Rhodes Centenary Celebrations (*World*, 1953d). In any event, Makhema and his choir were no longer available to take part when a second 'mixed-race concert' (*RDM*, 1955) was presented in St Mary's Cathedral, a year after the first one. Some continuity was provided by the participation of J.J.M. Sealanyane and his Sophiatown Methodist Choir. Sealanyane had been the 'Director' of the Jubilee Singers while Makhema had been the 'Conductor' (*World*, 1954b), and the two men had been joint conductors of the Sophiatown Methodist Choir, many of whose members also sang in the Jubilee Singers (*World*, 1953c). At the Cathedral concert, the choir sang 'unaccompanied Bantu songs' as the Jubilee Singers had done the previous year, but of the *Messiah* items accompanied by Traunek and the JSO, the solos were this time taken by white singers, and there was only one chorus: inevitably, 'Hallelujah', as finale.

Huddleston again made a speech, and the sentences quoted in the *Rand Daily Mail* highlight the contrast he drew between the circumstances of this performance and the norm of segregation that was steadily being enforced in most other contexts:

We are grateful that it is still possible in the House of God to have concerts in which the performers and audience are of mixed races. This is as it should be and we thank God for it.

(*RDM*, 1955)

The *Messiah* performance thus enacted opposition to the direction of National Party policy, through the mixed racial composition of its performers and audience. Huddleston's words, however, specifically located that opposition in the physical and ideological space of the church. His presence, as both a priest and a prominent anti-apartheid activist, dramatized his conviction that apartheid was incompatible with Christianity. For anyone who shared Huddleston's view, *Messiah's* identity as a Christian work entailed that it, too, stood in opposition to an oppressive system: this became part of its meaning on this occasion.

The lengths to which that system was willing to go in order to realize its vision of racial separation was brought directly to Huddleston's door in one of its starkest forms in the time between this performance and his departure from South Africa. 1954 saw the appearance of the piece of apartheid legislation that was to impact most directly on Huddleston's beloved Sophiatown. This was one of a few urban areas where Africans had managed to acquire property, and were therefore able to escape to some extent the control of state officials (Ross, 1999a: 119). The Native Resettlement Act 'established a resettlement board which was empowered to buy, sell or expropriate

property and to plan townships' (Maylam, 1986: 180). As a result of this measure, thousands of people were forcibly removed from Sophiatown and nearby areas and resettled in the new townships of Diepkloof and Meadowlands, which formed part of the growing black 'metropolis' of Soweto (South-Western Townships). Amongst these people would undoubtedly have been many who sang in the two Cathedral concerts, and since the first removals took place only a couple of weeks before the second concert, this issue would have formed an inescapable backdrop to the concert. Robert Ross (1999a: 119) argues that Sophiatown became a particular target because it was a centre both of Johannesburg's black cultural life and of political opposition to the Nationalist Government. Since Huddleston was closely involved in both, he was already set on a collision course with the government, but it was the removals more than anything else that became the focus of his condemnation of apartheid policy. According to Lucille Davie, who bases her observations on Robin Denniston's biography of Huddleston, towards the end of 1955 Huddleston was constantly being harassed by the police, and lived with the threat of arrest, imprisonment and deportation hanging over his head (Davie, 2001). Whether for his own protection or to avoid becoming embroiled in political conflict, the Community recalled Huddleston to England at the end of 1955.

It was at the same time that Joseph Traunek also left South Africa. Pamela Tancsik (2007) says that this was for 'political reasons', though she does not adduce specific evidence for this or elaborate on what these reasons might have been, beyond the suggestion that the political situation in South Africa might have reminded him of Nazi Germany. What is clear from her account is that he informed the JSO in July 1955 that he was planning a European tour which was expected to last several months. He left in December, and in July 1956 he wrote to a member of the orchestra to say that he would not be returning. Whether or not this had been his intention all along, it certainly seems likely that Traunek had come to feel the precariousness of his own position in South Africa, given his close association with Huddleston, his activities in the townships, his involvement in collaborative ventures such as the *Messiah* performances, and his earlier experience of persecution at the hands of another racial ideology.

The departure of Makhema, Traunek and Huddleston meant the end of what might otherwise have developed as an annual event, centred on the performance of items from *Messiah*. We do not know exactly which items were performed in the two concerts that did take place, although each of the *Rand Daily Mail* reviews selects two arias as particularly worthy of mention. We do not know how each member of the audience may have experienced these, but we do know that opposition to apartheid was a prominent element in the performance context. Many would have interpreted what they heard within this framework, particularly those for whom the Christian tradition was seen as providing assistance in their struggle. When, therefore, the soprano (unnamed, but presumably a member of the choir) sang in 1954 'I know that my Redeemer liveth', the text (supported by the serene confidence of the music) would have conveyed the assurance of Christ's presence with those experiencing injustice, and the promise that the time would come when 'he shall stand ... upon the earth'. The bass would have been heard proclaiming a similar message in the recitative, 'Thus saith the Lord', where the text promises that in 'yet a little while ... the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple'. The text of the following aria asks (rhetorically) 'Who shall stand when he appeareth?' The implication is

clearly that nothing has the power to do so, and this was surely a timely reminder given the apparently irresistible power of the apartheid state: it, too, would ultimately be swept away by the refiner's fire so vividly portrayed by Handel's rushing, flickering accompaniment. When, the following year, Lionel Ryder sang *Messiah's* opening recitative and aria, it must have brought a message of hope and comfort to those whose lives had been completely disrupted by the removals, as well as to their neighbours who were threatened. Is it too fanciful to suggest that, when Nanda Chiesa sang 'How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace', the image that came to the minds of many listeners might have been that of Huddleston, the latter-day missionary, and those who worked with him?

What of the 'Hallelujah' Chorus? In 1954 it might appropriately have celebrated the triumph of the choir, rising to a new level of achievement, and it might have praised God, as Huddleston did, for the fact that black and white were able to come together to perform and listen. By 1955 the horizon had darkened, and it might perhaps have been heard to a more significant extent as representing the hope of eventual victory in the struggle. As it reverberated round 'the lofty building' (*RDM*, 1955), it might indeed have helped people to sustain their confidence that, beyond 'the kingdom of this world', with all its oppression, lay a different kingdom and a greater power, which would bring them freedom.

These can only be speculations, one possible interpretation of the way a certain performance context may have articulated *Messiah* with a certain social, political and theological outlook to create a certain set of meanings. Their plausibility may indeed be enhanced by suggestions from other similar contexts that such interpretations were made. For example, when the tenor Khabi Mngoma sang 'Comfort Ye My People' as one of his items in a concert with the Durban City Orchestra in 1956, the local African newspaper *Ilanga* reported that he sang it with 'a sympathy which carried a special meaning for the Africans in the audience' (*Ilanga*, 1956). The 'special meaning' is not spelt out, but the implication is clear that a source of comfort is appreciated in the circumstances in which Africans find themselves at this time. I shall make some further suggestions in this regard in the following chapters. In the documentary record represented by *Bantu World* at the time of the Johannesburg concerts, however, I was able to find only one rather oblique piece of evidence with which to support this interpretation. At the end of the article which describes Lucas Makhema's labours in the cause of an annual *Messiah* performance, the writer encourages him with these words: 'Stick to it friend Lucas. There is a tradition that *only a free people can sing "The Messiah"*. Let's see what results you can get' (*World*, 1954d; italics added). If it is true that only a free people can sing *Messiah*, the proven ability of Africans to sing it shows that they have the spirit of freedom, however oppressive the actual laws under which they are compelled to live. To advance this tradition, as Makhema hoped to do, was therefore to advance the cause of freedom. Understood in this way, a presentation of *Messiah* could be more than simply a symbol. Since it required people's active participation, as performers or listeners, and involved them collectively, it could create a sense of common purpose and identity, and through the emotional impact of the music support their confidence and determination.

Makhema was not able to realize his dream of an annual performance, but it was kept alive by another Secretary of the JBMF, Khabi Mngoma. It was through Mngoma's influence that an annual *Messiah* eventually became a reality in Soweto. Mngoma also

preserved something of the legacy of Joseph Traunek. Before his departure, Traunek had given Mngoma private lessons in Harmony, and in Choral and Orchestral Conducting, and ultimately it was Mngoma's efforts that produced the first orchestra consisting of musicians from the townships, which was able to accompany his own performances of *Messiah* and other oratorios. The important contribution of Khabi Mngoma in establishing *Messiah* in South Africa therefore forms the subject of the next chapter. As will appear from this, as well as his reappearance in Chapter 16, Mngoma also provides some further support for the idea of *Messiah*'s articulation with the struggle for freedom.

CHAPTER 14: The 'township' Messiah – Khabi Mngoma

Although the JACS was the first African choir in Johannesburg to present a complete *Messiah*, nothing similar seems to have been attempted for over a decade. Indeed, the JACS itself disappears from view after its second concert. Its temporal isolation thus prevented it from being seen as the start of something that could be thought of as a *Messiah* 'tradition' in the townships. The origins of such a tradition appear to lie in the early 1950s. This, at least, was the view of Khabi Mngoma, who (it is probably safe to say) conducted more performances of *Messiah* in Johannesburg's townships over the next two decades than anyone else. The beginnings of his own relationship with this music show very clearly his connections to the socio-cultural milieu that has already been identified as the context for *Messiah*'s early history in the townships.

When I asked him about his earliest memories of *Messiah*, he went back to the 1930s and his time at the Salvation Army Primary School in Johannesburg's Eastern Native Township, where Mark Radebe was headmaster (Mngoma interview, 1997a). He recalled hearing *Messiah* choruses sung by choirs that were preparing for the Transvaal African Eisteddfodau, which Radebe had founded (see above: 168). As one of the few pianists in the area, Radebe was asked by various conductors to accompany their choirs in the preparation and performance of the *Messiah* choruses that had been prescribed for the competitions. I wondered how Mngoma had come to attend those rehearsals and performances, and he explained that the connection had been through another figure we have already encountered, whom he described as 'an older person that I admired, a sort of role model': none other than Walter Nhlapo (see above: 173 and 179). Mngoma's contact with Nhlapo began at a concert in the communal hall of the Eastern Native Township, which was packed for a performance by the touring choir of Adams College under Reuben Caluza. Nhlapo

was standing at the door of the communal hall, and he could see because he was tall and I couldn't, and I wanted to see – I could only hear what was going on. So I pushed around, and he could see my frustration, so he invited me to stand next to him, and he pushed the other people out and I could peer through. And then we met quite often at other things that were happening at the communal hall.

(Mngoma interview, 1997b).

As this relationship developed, Nhlapo took Mngoma to some of the events where Radebe was accompanying choirs, and Mngoma also began to visit Nhlapo at his home, where he had what Mngoma described as 'a fabulous collection of the standard recordings, 78s, the *Messiah* and others'. In their listening sessions, Mngoma would ask Nhlapo to play, amongst other music, the various items from *Messiah* that he had heard Mark Radebe accompanying: '*Messiah* was one of the regulars in those sessions,' he recalled. The choruses that particularly stood out for Mngoma from this time were 'And the glory of the Lord' and, of course, 'Hallelujah'.

At his next school, St Peter's (Anglican) Secondary School in Rosettenville, Johannesburg, he was mentored in piano and singing by Fr Trelawney Ross, and it was in this context that he first recalled having sung some of the tenor arias from the *Messiah* himself (Mngoma interview, 1997a). He continued to encounter items from

Messiah during his time at Kilnerton Institution in Pretoria, where he joined the choir and matriculated in 1944, and then at Adams College, where he went to train as a teacher, joining the choir and taking his first formal singing lessons with Simon Ngubane. Mzilikazi Khumalo (1995: n.p.) states that it was Ngubane who introduced Mngoma to *Messiah*, but given what has been said above, it would seem that Ngubane's role would rather have been to build on foundations that had already been laid.

A pro/con-fusion of voices at Orlando

In her doctoral thesis on the life and work of Khabi Mngoma, Inge Mari' Burger (1992: 59-60) states that the first of many occasions on which Mngoma conducted *Messiah* was a performance by the Orlando Music Society, given under the auspices of the Syndicate of African Artists. She makes a strong claim for this performance as a 'historical landmark', which again rests on the assumed greatness of *Messiah*:

It was the Sowetonians' first experience of this great work. Thus it was also the first ever South African performance of the Messiah in its entirety, rendered by black South African musicians – a great achievement.

(ibid: 60)

As we have seen, this is not literally true since there had been an earlier performance of *Messiah* by black South Africans, but this one may nevertheless have been Mngoma's first, and perhaps the first actually presented in the township, since the earlier one had been at a venue in central Johannesburg. In any event, it was clear that this performance should occupy an important place in my discussion, but to gather further information on the performance and its context I needed a specific date for it, which Burger does not provide. Her mention of it comes amidst a discussion of Mngoma's activities during the late 1940s and early 1950s. As I attempted to track down references to this performance in other sources, I was presented with an unexpectedly confusing tangle of partial and contradictory statements. In the discussion which follows I attempt to unravel them, and in the process uncover a performance that was directly involved in the conflicts that attended the appearance of the early apartheid legislation. The singers who took part in the *Messiah* performance added their own voices to those that were debating the pros and cons of what was to become known as 'Bantu Education'.

I read Burger's statement only after I had interviewed Mngoma myself on more than one occasion, and was puzzled that I could not seem to recall him having said anything about a performance by the Orlando Music Society. On returning to my interview transcripts, I could indeed find no reference to it. Given the fact that *Messiah*'s South African history was the explicit topic of our discussions, it seemed strange that he had forgotten to mention this very significant performance to me – or was it that he had decided not to do so for some reason? We had discussed at some length a performance which he said had started a 'tradition' of *Messiah* performances in Soweto, but I had sufficient detail about that performance to establish that it was clearly a different one, which I shall discuss in the next section (see below: 205). Unfortunately his illness and death in 1999 prevented me from being able to seek clarification directly from him.

Mzilikazi Khumalo, who based his account on personal communication from Mngoma (at one point he uses the phrase 'Khabi tells me that ...'), does mention something that connects to Burger's thesis through its mention of the Syndicate of African Artists (SAA):

In the early fifties, Professor Khabi Mngoma started working on choruses and arias from the Messiah with students who were being trained under the auspices of the Syndicate of African Artists Professor Mngoma ran the music wing of the syndicate and met his students at the D.O.C.C. (the Donaldson Community Centre) in Orlando, and at the B.M.S.C.

(1995: n.p.)

However, since there is no suggestion of a complete performance and no mention of the Orlando Music Society, this does not seem to be what Burger was referring to: Mngoma had evidently not mentioned it to Khumalo either. This omission again seemed strange, given the prominence afforded to the performance by Burger.

My own search of the copies of *Bantu World* did yield one reference to a *Messiah* performance under the auspices of the SAA at this time: it was announced for 16 December 1952 at the DOCC (*World*, 1952g). The venue provides a tenuous link to Khumalo's account, and the report also contains a suggestion that the performance might be a 'first', which links it to Burger's claim, though in a more muted register: the writer comments that *Messiah* is a work 'which I have seen being performed by Europeans only so far This is an entirely all-African effort!' The report also confirms Khabi Mngoma's involvement, but only as tenor soloist, along with his wife Grace (alto), Ida April (soprano) and Lucas Scott (bass). The 'organ accompanist' was to be Jacob Moeketsi, now perhaps best remembered as the most famous of the pianists associated with the Jazz Maniacs (C. Ballantine, 1993: 34). He had been trained as a classical pianist at Healdtown and a year before the *Messiah* performance had accompanied Khabi Mngoma in a number of classical song recitals (*World*, 1951c). Since the DOCC is very unlikely to have had a pipe organ, he presumably played either an electronic organ or a harmonium. If the report had gone on to state clearly that Khabi Mngoma was also the conductor, and identified the performers as the Orlando Music Society, I would have concluded that I had found Burger's performance. Alas, the conductor is not named, and a quite different choir is credited: the 'People's High School Choral Society'. Nevertheless, this reference to a 'People's High School' was the clue that brought me as near as I was able to come to solving the puzzle.

The necessary historical context for this is the rise in radicalism amongst African teachers following the 1948 election victory of the National Party, and especially after the appointment of 'apartheid enthusiast' Dr W.W.M. Eiselen as Secretary for Native Affairs (Davenport & Saunders, 2000 [1977]: 388) and 'apartheid ideologue' Dr H.F. Verwoerd as Minister of Native Affairs (Saunders & Southey, 2001 [1998]: 188). In 1949 Eiselen was appointed to chair the Bantu Education Commission. The writer of an article in TATA's journal, *The Good Shepherd*, already saw in January 1950 the direction in which apartheid education policy was heading:

It (the Government commission) wants to find out how it can give the African the training necessary to make him an efficient worker, without giving him any real education, for the simple reason that it would be dangerous if the oppressed sector of the population were sufficiently advanced to fight for their freedom.

(quoted in Lodge, 1983: 120)

The commission's Report, tabled in 1951, proposed a separate educational system for the Bantu-speaking people, controlled by the central government rather than the provinces, and ... by the Department of Native Affairs rather than by the Union Department of Education. It also argued for a differential syllabus for Africans, designed to prepare them for their special place in society.

(Davenport & Saunders, 2000 [1977]: 388-9)

Eiselen's aim was 'to anchor the African child in his own culture ... [with] special emphasis on manual training, to provide an avenue to employment in the white-controlled economy' (ibid: 389). His proposals were taken up in the Bantu Education Act of 1953, which meant that African education would no longer be primarily under the control of the churches and missions (Saunders & Southey, 2001 [1998]: 67). The institutions now under threat were the very ones that had first introduced *Messiah* to Africans and had provided the environment within which it had become familiar to so many in the educated African community. Indeed, the whole idea of Africans performing *Messiah* was surely contrary to an emphasis on involvement in 'their own culture', by which was meant indigenous African culture, without European influences. I shall return to this point (see below: 203 and 221), but our immediate concern is with how the People's High School Choral Society and their performance of *Messiah* fit into this picture.

When the Eiselen Report was published, leadership of TATA was in the hands of 'a group of young radical teachers from Orlando High School': Zeph Mothopeng (President), Ezekiel Mphahlele (Secretary), and Isaac Matlare (Journal Editor) (Hyslop, 1999: 34). They 'began to campaign quite effectively along the Reef, organising meetings of teachers and parents to explain and condemn the findings of the Eiselen Commission' (Lodge, 1983: 120). In July 1952, Mothopeng, Mphahlele and Matlare were sacked. A statement from TATA noted that they had never been charged with any breach of regulations, and asserted that the real reasons for the dismissal lay in TATA's opposition to government policy, and in particular its rejection of the Eiselen Commission Report (Hyslop, 1999: 35-36). On 10 August, a Parents' Protest Committee convened a mass meeting at the DOCC, attended by about 500 people. A resolution was sent to the Director of the Transvaal Education Department 'warning that a school boycott would be called and alternative classes organized for the students unless the three were reinstated' (ibid). Hyslop states that the boycott received the support of more than two thirds of the students at Orlando High, and that about 100 attended the 'alternative classes' held at the DOCC. Lodge describes the same events much more briefly, but provides an essential clue when he says that the parents established a 'people's school' for the boycotters (1983: 117). It seemed to me very probable that the People's High School Choral Society was connected in some way to this.

How, then, was Khabi Mngoma involved? Mngoma was one of the people interviewed by N. Chabani Manganyi for his biography of Ezekiel Mphahlele, and a number of relevant details appear in the section of Manganyi's book where he reproduces what Mngoma said to him, in the guise of a fictionalized conversation between Mngoma and Mphahlele (Manganyi, 1983-74). In 1948 Mngoma himself had joined the staff at Orlando High School. He became a member of a study and discussion group, not directly attached to the school but including a number of

Orlando teachers, Mphahlele, Mothopeng and Matlare among them. They began to publish a monthly bulletin that became known as *The Voice*, and included social, political and cultural criticism. Mphahlele was Editor and Mngoma was Assistant Editor. When the Eiselen Report was released, various attacks on it appeared in the pages of *The Voice*. As a result Mngoma in fact became the first of the Orlando teachers to be dismissed, at the end of 1951. In his view, he was the easiest target: the authorities felt the need to be more cautious in the case of the other three, because of their higher profile and status.

Returning now to my second interview with Mngoma, the following comments assumed a significance I had not previously realized:

KM: When we were sacked from Orlando High School in '51, '52, ... we had the pupils who stayed out in protest - we got them together into a performing group - Zeke Mphahlele oversaw the process of them doing theatre, adapting folk tales, and I started with a choir with them, and we started doing excerpts from the *Messiah*, especially the solo singing and group singing, and this is one of the earlier performances at the Orlando YMCA Hall, from that group.

CC: Oh - did it have a name at that stage, or what did you ...

KM: Well it eventually became the Syndicate of African Artists ...

CC: Oh, I see, yes ...

KM: Both theatre and writers, but it started off as a protest group.

(Mngoma interview, 1997b)

It now seems to me that Mngoma is here referring to the same performance that is announced in the *Bantu World*. Mngoma's reference to 'excerpts' had at first rather overshadowed his mention of a performance, and I wondered whether this had also happened in the case of Khumalo's account (see above: 193). My understanding of Mngoma's comments here had also been influenced by their similarity to another reference to 'excerpts', made in his third interview with me: 'When we got sacked we started a youth group and one of the regular things we did was excerpts from the *Messiah* – "Glory of the Lord" and so on, "Hallelujah" Chorus – this was '51, '52' (Mngoma interview, 1997c). I suggest that here he is in fact describing the beginnings of a process which led, some months later, to the complete performance. Perhaps he made no specific reference in either interview to the 'people's school' because these were essentially extra-curricular activities, but it nevertheless seemed clear that he was working with the same students who were involved in the more formal 'alternative classes' being given in the wake of the dismissals. He might initially have taught one or two choruses as part of this activity, without any intention of presenting a performance. Perhaps by the end of the year there was enough material to invite soloists to join in something that could be advertised as a complete performance. It may have been specifically for this performance that the group was given the formal name 'People's High School Choral Society'. It is also possible that the students were joined by sympathetic teachers or even parents.

One piece of the puzzle that still seemed not to fit was his allusion to the Orlando YMCA Hall as the performance venue, rather than the DOCC. He may simply have forgotten which of his many activities took place in which hall at which time, but there also seemed to be another possibility. According to a CV which Mngoma gave me, he was at the time a member of the board of control of the Orlando YMCA (Mngoma CV, 1993, archival source). If the YMCA was in fact based at the DOCC, these might simply be two different ways of referring to the same venue. The

correctness of this hypothesis was confirmed by David Anthony's preliminary research into the South African history of the YMCA (2005: 437), in which he mentions interviewing a YMCA official who had started working at the DOCC in 1956.

Had Mngoma after all mentioned the performance of which Burger makes so much – was it in fact this performance? If so, its attribution to the Orlando Music Society must be mistaken; if not, there must have been another, earlier performance. As I investigated further, the first possibility began to seem the more likely, since I discovered a large number of discrepancies amongst the various sources of information on Mngoma's activities at this time, and particularly his involvement in the Orlando Music Society and the Syndicate of African Artists.

I began by attempting to establish when the Society and the Syndicate had been founded: if they were not even in existence prior to 1952 this would rule out an earlier performance. As regards the Society, Yvonne Huskisson's article on Mngoma in the *South African Music Encyclopedia* (1984: 247) says that he founded it in 1948. Burger gives the same year, but adds the names of Mphahlele and Matlare as founders (1992: 58). Mngoma's CV (1993, archival source) states that he was a member of the Society already in 1947, but says nothing about having founded it. My own search of *Bantu World* established an earlier date, which on the one hand made an earlier performance possible, but simultaneously cast doubt on the reliability of the details presented by Burger. In October 1945, the newspaper carried an item which announced: 'A musical group known as the Orlando Musical Society has been formed in that Township' (*World*, 1945). It was 'under the guidance' of Joseph Traunek, and none of the names mentioned by Burger as founders are amongst those listed in the newspaper as being on the Executive Committee. At various times there were plans to start a school of music (*World*, 1946c), and a choral group (*World*, 1946d) under the Society's auspices, but it is not clear that much ever came of these initiatives: the Society's main activity seems to have been the promotion of concerts of classical music. I found no mention of a *Messiah* performance.

The situation regarding the Syndicate was even more confusing. Huskisson (1984: 247) states that Mngoma 'created' it in 1949, a date confirmed by Mngoma's CV (1993, archival source), which more modestly describes him as a 'co-founder'. Burger (1992: 59) again gives 1948 as the date, and again adds the names of Mphahlele and Matlare, which raises the suspicion that information about the Syndicate and the Society might have become muddled. Mphahlele discusses the Syndicate in his autobiography *Down Second Avenue*, without giving any dates, but towards the end he says that it 'has folded up now', adding: 'We enjoyed every step of that run of nine years' (1959: 215). If he is thinking back from the time of writing, that would give a starting date around 1950. However, Coplan (citing the *Bantu World*), says that the Syndicate was forced to disband in 1956 due to police harassment (1985: 204), which would give a starting date around 1945, the year Mphahlele was appointed as a teacher at Orlando High. The little information in Robert Kavanagh's *Theatre and Cultural Struggle in South Africa* is drawn from Mphahlele's autobiography, and gives no dates (1985: 47). Martin Orkin (1991: 71-2), who bases his account on Kavanagh and Coplan, suggests that the Syndicate was founded in the 'mid-1940s', without citing any further evidence. One's impression of the reliability of this is not enhanced by his renaming of Mngoma as 'Khoti', an error which is now unhappily

being replicated, for example in the South African chapter of *A History of Theatre in Africa* (Hutchison, 2004: 348). Bhekizizwe Peterson (2000: 4), without citing any specific evidence, suggests the 'mid-1950s' for the emergence of the Syndicate. In Manganyi's book (1983: 67), 'Mngoma' says that he and Mphahlele 'decided to establish' the Syndicate in 1948 (which does just leave open the possibility that it was *actually* started a little later), but in the same book (ibid: 111) 'Mphahlele' (as represented by Manganyi) says that it came into being in April 1952, and as co-founders adds the names of Walter Nhlapo and Jacob Moeketsi to those of Mngoma and himself. It is in fact this last date that was confirmed by my own search of *Bantu World*. In May 1952 a report appeared which included the following statement: 'Early this year, a new musical body to develop African talent in the world of art, was formed and is called the Syndicate of African Artists' (*World*, 1952c). I found several further items referring to the Syndicate after this date, none before it. If Burger's performance took place under the auspices of the Syndicate, it could not have been earlier than 1952, and therefore almost certainly not before the one by the People's High School Choral Society.

My conclusion from all this is that Khabi Mngoma first conducted *Messiah* with a group of students involved in the boycott of Orlando High School, brought together (possibly with some teachers and parents) as the People's High School Choral Society, on 16 December 1952. It was the first complete performance by township musicians for many years, and to those who had no memory of Mlisa's performance (such as the writer of the announcement in *Bantu World*) it would have seemed that this was *Messiah*'s first presentation by an 'all-African' group. It very probably was the first complete performance actually to take place at a township venue. However, some explanation of the confusion surrounding this performance does seem necessary. It seems to me that it stems primarily from the profusion of activities in which Khabi Mngoma himself was involved, as well the profusion of different activities that emerged in Orlando during the late 1940s and early 1950s, many of which involved the same people, and especially the teachers at Orlando High. Zeph Mothopeng provides a good example of such multiple involvement. In addition to being a teacher at the school, and (as we have seen) President of TATA and a member of the study circle from which *The Voice* emerged, he also directed the prestigious Orlando High School Choir (see, for example, *World*, 1951a) as well as the Orlando Choral Group (*World*, 1946b), which on at least one occasion took part in a concert under the auspices of the Orlando Musical Society (*World*, 1947), of which Mothopeng was also a committee member, having been elected at its second AGM in 1946 (*World*, 1946c).

Between all the various groups performing and promoting the performing arts, and the people involved both in these and associated with each other in different contexts, it is not surprising that some difficulties have arisen in trying to keep track of exactly who was doing what at which time. I suspect that it is not just researchers but their interviewees (primarily Mngoma and Mphahlele) who have not always found it easy to remember all the details. Particularly in the interview setting, from which so much of this material is derived, it is unlikely that informants will, on the spur of the moment, produce a completely ordered account that includes all the relevant details about everything. The interviews typically go back and forth over the same time period several times, following different threads, returning to aspects that were not fully covered before, perhaps intending to do so but then following some new thought.

Burger recognizes something of this when she says: 'It is important to bear in mind that Khabi Mngoma was always occupied with many activities at once, i.e. from 1948 he involved himself in a veritable network of activities that is difficult to comprehend at first reading' (1992: 78). The difficulty may not simply lie in the effort of comprehension. In the Preface to her thesis, Burger does mention the inconsistencies which she found within her source materials themselves (ibid: xxii), but it nonetheless seems to me that she generally treats what Mngoma told her simply as fact, without always attempting to resolve the contradictions or at least identify them for the reader. A clear example of this is the following, the source being 'personal communication, Khabi Mngoma, May 1985': 'I was dismissed from the teaching profession in 1952, and Es'kia and Isaac followed suit in 1953' (ibid: 62). There are two problems here: Zeph Mothopeng has disappeared from the group, and other sources make it clear that the dismissals happened one year earlier in each case. It may well be that in his original communication, Mngoma referred only to Mphahlele and Matlare because he had just been discussing, or was about to discuss, some *other* activity in which just the three of them were involved: probably the teaching at the 'people's school', since we know from Manganyi (1983: 71) that Mothopeng did not join the other three in this 'because he felt he did not want to jeopardise his case against the Department of Education'. Burger thus seems to have conflated the figures of Mngoma and Mothopeng, leading her to say, for example, that the students 'came out in a protest campaign against the dismissal of Khabi Mngoma and his two colleagues' (1992: 62).

Manganyi, quoting Leon Edel, recognizes that 'flashbacks, retrospective chapters, summary chapters, jumps from childhood to maturity, glimpses of the future, forays into the past' are 'the way we live and move', and in fact he attempts to make a virtue out of this by constructing his biography of Mphahlele accordingly, 'in the spirit of the new *avant garde* biography' (1983: 5). Edel proposes the use of these techniques as a way of achieving what he regards as the biographer's main aim, sorting out themes and patterns in the material. While this serves as an important corrective to the mere chronicling of information, both in biographical and more general historical writing, it seems clear from what has emerged above that the 'dates and mundane calendar events' do not, as Edel suggests, 'sort themselves out', and that insufficient attention to the problems of sorting them out can sometimes undermine the attempt to discern themes and patterns.

I shall offer just one more suggestion of how the confusion might have arisen in a specific case, which is also of wider relevance to the history of the performing arts in South Africa since it touches on the Syndicate of African Artists. Mngoma was indeed running a choir at Orlando High School during his time there, not only after the boycotts in 1952. It was called the 'Vulgus Choir', and it consisted of 'the group of students who had not managed to pass auditions to belong to the established school choirs' (Mngoma, 1998: 44). However, if this choir consisted of inexperienced singers, it is unlikely to have tackled *Messiah*, certainly not to have attempted a complete performance: its purpose was to provide an alternative. Burger gives the impression that it concentrated on various forms of African music (1992: 55ff.). Nevertheless, it is possible that at some point Mngoma's activities with the students before the dismissals have been conflated with those that took place after the dismissals (which *did* include the teaching of *Messiah*). Mphahlele too seems to have worked on drama with the students before his dismissal (see Manganyi, 1983: 96-7). The similarities between these activities and those that took place after the dismissals

could easily have led to all of them being thought of as happening under the auspices of the SAA, even though the Syndicate was only formalized as an organization in 1952. One reference to the Syndicate by Mphahlele suggests that the earlier activities may quite literally have fed into the later ones: 'Most of our players were those who had started with me at the high school and were teachers, clerks, nurses, messengers, factory workers' (Mphahlele, 1959: 180).

There is an intriguing postscript to all this. On 4 April 1953, the 'Entertainment' column of the *Bantu World* carried the following announcement:

The Myafrica Choral Society, directed and conducted by Mr. Khabi Mngoma will give a performance of Handel's Greatest Living Oratorio tomorrow, Sunday April 5, at 2.30 p.m., at the Donaldson Orlando Community Centre, Johannesburg, to raise funds for the new independent Myafrica High School.

(*World*, 1953a)

I don't think there can be any doubt that *Messiah* is the work referred to! The attribution of greatness is familiar enough, but the addition of 'living' is unique. It very likely represents nothing more than a catch-phrase imported from other contexts ('Who is the world's greatest living author?'), but it rather nicely suggests both that the oratorio continues to 'live' because it has relevance for audiences, and that it is being kept 'alive' by an ongoing performance tradition, to which the Myafrica Choral Society is now offering its contribution.

This time Mngoma is clearly identified as the conductor, but it is only the name of the school that offers any clues to the context of this performance. Unfortunately there are once again certain discrepancies in the various sources. It is clear that this school arose out of the same situation that we have just examined – the dismissals and boycott at Orlando High – and it sometimes seems as though 'My-Africa' is simply another name for the People's High School already discussed. In Manganyi's book, the following fictionalized exchange occurs between 'Mngoma' and 'Mphahlele':

[KM]: When the students came out on that boycott we mounted a school at the Donaldson Community Centre. Remember the name of the school?

[EM]: Hm ... the My-Africa School, that was it Khabi. Quite a name!

[KM]: It reflected the spirit of the time. We were refusing to be browbeaten into submission You and Matlhare came and we ran classes in August, September and October.

(1983: 71)

This makes it sound as though the school had a brief life of not more than three months, but this does not accord with the announcement of the *Messiah* performance in April the following year. Hyslop confirms that

the boycott came apart when, in October [1952], a shooting incident outside Orlando High School gave the police an opportunity to arrest a substantial number of students. Eighteen appeared in court in early November on charges of public violence.

(1999: 37)

A statement by 'Mngoma' to the effect that 'before the end of that year many of the students of the My-Africa High School started streaming back to Orlando High' (Manganyi: 72) therefore seems to me to reflect the end of the boycott. It was not, however, the end of the school, as a number of students did not return to Orlando High. In Manganyi, the number who remained at My-Africa is given as about 87

(ibid). At this point, it is useful to consider the following passage taken from an interview with Mngoma published in *Tribute* magazine:

Students protested against our dismissal and started boycotts. Of course, it ended up in them getting thrown out as well. We had something like 250 to 300 students who couldn't go to any school. We held classes for them at the Donaldson and we called that My-Afrika [sic] High School.

(Makgabutlane, 1989: 16).

What I want to highlight from this passage is the mention of students being 'thrown out'. My suggestion is that the larger number of students (250 to 300) includes all those who originally joined the boycott. While many returned to Orlando High when the boycott ended, the smaller number (around 87) did not, and this resulted in their being expelled from the school. The alternative classes then continued in order to cater for them, initially taking the name 'People's High School' (hence the announcement of the *Messiah* performance by a choral society with this name in December) but then being renamed 'My-Africa High School', probably for the beginning of the new year in 1953. Perhaps because the name 'My-Africa' had such resonance, it has subsequently been recalled along with memories of all the alternative teaching activities that occurred after the dismissals, making it seem from some accounts that the activities of this school had ceased before the end of 1952, whereas in fact it was only the boycott as such that had. Mngoma's CV (1993, archival source) includes under the heading of 'Positions/Employment' a period (1952-53) as Principal and teacher at the 'My-Africa High School, Soweto', which accords with the school's continuation into the next year and indicates that he was not simply directing musical activities but in fact took over the leading role in this whole initiative.

As previously mentioned, Burger places all these events a year later, but she, too, implies that the school lasted no more than a few months. She dates its beginnings to the protests against the dismissals, which she assigns to 'mid-year in 1953', and says it was forced to close down at the end of 1953 (1992: 62). This, too, would rule out an April performance of *Messiah* by a choral society associated with the school, in any year. Another anomaly in Burger's account is her use of the name 'Mayibuye' instead of 'My-Africa' for the school, a name which appears in no other source. Unless this is simply a mistake, the only possibility is that the school was renamed yet again some time between April and the closure of the school later in the year. While Burger's version therefore seems unreliable in some respects, it does contain some useful details. She says that the school was located at the Orlando YMCA, providing further confirmation for my earlier hypothesis that Mngoma used this as another name for the DOCC. She says that 'the school's curriculum placed strong emphasis on music, which was not surprising, giving Khabi Mngoma's principalship' (ibid). This would therefore have provided an ideal context in which *Messiah* could be taught.

The stated purpose of the *Messiah* concert was to raise funds. Burger says that 'in order to finance the school, the pupils gave regular concerts, including performances of Western classical music' (ibid: 63). Because of *Messiah*'s popularity and prestige, there could have been few choices better calculated to bring in an audience of the size needed to contribute a substantial amount to the coffers. *Messiah*'s seasonal associations also recommended it. The date for this performance, 5 April, was in fact Easter Sunday, and the previous performance by the 'People's High School Choral Society' had taken place a week before Christmas. The performances thus offered opportunities for people not only to listen to a famous classical work, but also a way

of marking and celebrating the two Christian festivals which are also important secular holiday periods.

Both these performances seem likely to have served other purposes as well. *Messiah's* familiar role of demonstrating a certain level of achievement could be turned in new directions. The authorities in charge of the education system, and Orlando High in particular, sought to justify the dismissal of the teachers by discrediting them in various ways. In Manganyi's book, 'Mphahlele' complains bitterly of the way the chairperson of the School Committee, Winifred Hoernlé, 'depicted me as a culprit, as a rebel and an incompetent teacher who was without any dedication to the profession' (1983: 110). In one of his letters written at the time, he mentions her claim that the teachers 'started a "rebel" school' (ibid: 107). Any notable success by the independent school would have helped to undermine the credibility of these accusations. In these circumstances, the *Messiah* performances were able to demonstrate what the school was capable of, with an effectiveness that could be matched by few other activities.

In the first place, as a musical performance open to the public, it provided much wider exposure for the school than could be gained simply by pursuing its regular educational programme. The acknowledged status of *Messiah* meant that its performance would automatically be regarded as representing a high level of achievement – all the greater since this was something that had not been attempted by any other township school, or indeed in recent years by any other township group. The representation of the performance as a 'first' thus becomes even more significant. There could be no doubt of the competence of the teachers who had guided the students in this, or of their dedication to their educational task. These were clearly not 'rebels' interested in nothing but politics and causing disruption. It was hardly possible for the authorities to represent *Messiah* as a subversive work (which is not to say that its performance in this context might not have had subversive implications, as we shall see). As a communal activity, it also served to demonstrate to outsiders the unity of those involved, their joint commitment to a common cause, and by drawing in a range of other performers from the community helped to counter the impression that these were a few isolated troublemakers without significant support. For the performers themselves, taking part in a collective effort would have helped to create solidarity at a time when it was sorely needed, and to sustain morale as the going became tougher.

Even before the complete performances, during the early struggles between the authorities and the dismissed teachers, the choruses from *Messiah* that were already being taught would also have been heard in new and sometimes surprising contexts that gave them new meaning. At the height of the boycott campaign, the three teachers were arrested and charged with incitement to public violence (Hyslop, 1999: 36). Their subsequent acquittal was 'an important psychological and moral victory' (ibid: 37), both for the teachers and for those students whose testimony helped to secure the acquittal (and perhaps also for the lawyer who represented Mothopeng, Nelson Mandela). 'Hallelujah' was one of the choruses Mngoma mentions working on with the students – quite possibly it was the first. If it was not sung specifically for the purpose of celebrating this victory, I imagine that when it was sung soon afterwards it would have felt to those involved an apt expression of the spirit which was carrying them forward with renewed vigour: indeed, it might have played a role in helping to maintain that spirit. If so, this would have constituted an important layer

of meaning carried forward by the students into the subsequent complete performances, and by Mngoma himself into the future, since this appears to have been his first experience of teaching and conducting it. More than once in his interviews with me he referred back to the enthusiasm these students had shown for the music, and this seems to have strengthened his awareness of *Messiah's* value to the community. It was one of the factors that motivated the performance which will be discussed in the next section: he referred to this later performance as 'coming from my experiences with how it caught on with the youngsters after our dismissal at Orlando High School' (Mngoma, 1997c). Reflecting on a lifetime's involvement with *Messiah*, Mngoma commented that 'it always had this rousing effect on people', and spoke of the way 'the *Messiah* message was very pertinent, very necessary to sustain ... the morale of communities' (Mngoma, 1997b). Such comments certainly seem relevant to the context in which these early performances occurred, and it is likely that the performances themselves shaped Mngoma's perceptions of *Messiah's* significance, perceptions which then continued to inform his subsequent work.

After the boycott itself had ended, the school began to face difficulties beyond the lack of funds. Manganyi's 'Mngoma' says:

What was worse was that we became polecats in the community because the teaching fraternity and the elite of Soweto felt that they didn't want to be associated with us. They got very scared and we soon found ourselves isolated.

(Manganyi, 1983: 72)

Hyslop confirms that 'the tide of opinion in TATA turned with the boycott's failure' and notes that Mothopeng, Mphahlele and Matlare were voted out of their executive positions at the TATA conference in July 1953 (1999: 37). There were immediate, pragmatic reasons for this. Many teachers, who might otherwise have been sympathetic to the Orlando group, became concerned that their own interests could not effectively be represented to authorities, because the Transvaal Education Department refused to negotiate with TATA as long as the radicals were in the leadership (*ibid.*).

However, there had always been a more conservative tendency amongst the teachers, paradoxically based on some of the same factors that had fuelled the radicalization of teachers in Orlando. Hyslop notes that Orlando had a much bigger middle class than any other township, probably because the higher-income sections of the African population had been drawn there by the relatively good quality of the housing that was initially provided. This middle class, many of whom were teachers, was nevertheless 'not particularly privileged' (*ibid.*: 33), sharing the township with growing numbers of the urban poor and facing high transport costs and living expenses. On the one hand, the resulting frustration 'was an important force behind the politicisation of Orlando in the late 40s' (*ibid.*), and for teachers an additional factor was the 'diminution of [their] status and autonomy, as they were subjected to the controls of Bantu Education' (*ibid.*: 39). It seemed to some that they had little to show for either their 'civilized' status or their previous restraint, and that only direct political action could now further their interests. On the other hand, there were some whose main concern was the preservation of the professional status and material benefits they had managed to achieve, however limited these might be. For most teachers, the attainment of a post was the result of a long struggle, not only for themselves but also for their families. This was not lightly to be put in jeopardy,

especially since there were few alternative avenues of employment available, and loss of a post thus 'threatened the teacher with a precipitous fall into the proletariat' (ibid: 43). There were also 'elements of the ideologies present in the mission education tradition that underpinned political quietism' (ibid: 44). Some teachers, such as the headmaster at Orlando High, Godfrey Nakene, took a pro-Bantu Education stance on the grounds that it would offer greater opportunities for Africans to climb to higher rungs of the educational hierarchy (Manganyi, 1983: 98).

Awareness of these differing standpoints highlights the radicalism of the position adopted by the dismissed teachers and their supporters, and suggests that the performances of *Messiah* by the People's and My-Africa Schools might have carried a further message about their own position and identity, and an implicit reminder to the more conservative group of what was at stake. To understand this, it is necessary to return to the proposals of the Eiselen Commission, opposition to which constitutes the most immediate context of these performances.

The aim of making education 'an integral part of a carefully planned policy of segregated socio-economic development' is already clear in the Eiselen Report (Christie & Collins, 1982: 59). Comments subsequently made by Dr Verwoerd in a speech to the Senate in 1954 have become notorious and frequently quoted, because they spell out so clearly the link between education and other aspects of apartheid policy, specifically the need for a 'cheap but not entirely illiterate labour force' (Beinart, 2001 [1994]: 160) in the urban areas, and the relegation of all aspirations beyond that to the homelands:

Deliberate attempts will be made to keep institutions for advanced education away from the urban environment and to establish them as far as possible in the Native reserves. It is the policy of my department that education would have its roots entirely in the Native areas and the Native environment and Native community. There Bantu education must be able to give itself complete expression and there it will perform its real service. The Bantu must be guided to serve his own community in all respects. There is no place for him in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour. Within his own community, however, all doors are open. For that reason it is of no avail for him to receive a training which has as its aim absorption in the European community, where he cannot be absorbed.

(quoted in Christie & Collins, 1982: 68)

In a parliamentary speech, referred to in the Eiselen Report, a prominent Nationalist politician argued against an academic education for Africans, asking with disarming frankness: 'Who is going to do the manual labour in the country? ... I am in thorough agreement with the view that we should so conduct our schools that the native who attends those schools will know that to a great extent he must be the labourer in the country' (ibid: 69-70). Despite the centrality of these economic imperatives of the capitalist system, culture was seen as having a vital role to play. The Eiselen Report placed particular emphasis on 'the functional value of the school as an institution for the transmission and development of black cultural heritage' (ibid: 59). Emphasis on the cultural differences between black and white could be used to make separation seem natural, desirable and inevitable. The passage from the Report quoted below recognises that natural endowment provides little basis for separation (perhaps surprisingly so for an ideology generally viewed as being based on notions of inherent

racial inferiority). However, it is precisely for this reason that culture's contribution must be seen as crucial:

The Bantu child comes to school with a basic physical and psychological endowment which differs so slightly, if at all, from that of the European child, that no special provision has to be made in educational theory or basic aims ... But education practice must recognise that it has to deal with a Bantu child, i.e. a child trained and conditioned in Bantu culture, endowed with a knowledge of a Bantu language and imbued with values, interests and behaviour patterns learned at the knee of a Bantu mother. These facts must dictate to a very large extent the content and methods of his early education. The schools must also give due regard to the fact that out of school hours the young Bantu child develops and lives in a Bantu community, and when he reaches maturity he will be concerned with sharing and developing the life and culture of that community.

(ibid: 69)

Mission education was particularly suspect because, in the eyes of the Nationalists, it had produced an elite that made claims for recognition in a common society (Beinart, 2001 [1994]: 160). Verwoerd instructed 'the Bantu teacher' to the effect that 'he must learn not to feel above his community, with a consequent desire to become integrated into the life of the European community' (quoted in Lodge, 1983: 118). As we have seen, such integration (in a cultural if not always a political sense) had indeed been the aim of the missionaries, and of subsequent liberal initiatives also, and I have suggested that *Messiah* played its part in furthering this project. Now the Eiselen Commission was criticising mission education on the grounds that it had destroyed Bantu culture and had only succeeded in 'making the native an imitation Westerner' (quoted in Saunders, 1994 [1988]: 379). If this sounds curiously like the discourse of Africanism, it is the political context of the 1950s that makes the difference as to how such criticisms of mission education were understood and received. It is that same context which impacts on how *Messiah* was received, as the principal representative of the Western musical culture introduced by the missionaries. The 'cultural' argument failed to carry any conviction for teachers like Mngoma and Mphahlele partly because it was made in the context of proposals for an educational system that was clearly seen as oppressive, and partly because they regarded Western culture as an integral component of their identity. In *Down Second Avenue* Mphahlele expressed his opinion on both aspects with characteristic trenchancy. On the one hand, 'African teachers were going to be used for training children to be slaves' (1959: 201), and on the other 'your tribal umbilical cord had long, oh so long, been severed and all the talk about Bantu culture and the Black man developing along his own lines was just so much tommy rot' (ibid: 203).

In this context, the performances of *Messiah* necessarily constituted a rejection of Bantu Education's definitions of African identity and the African's place in the order of things. By presenting one of the acknowledged masterpieces of Western music the teachers and their supporters dramatized their refusal to confine their efforts to what the Eiselen Report sought to represent as 'their own Bantu culture', and thus made a clear statement about their own identity. Because the proponents of Bantu Education had declared so plainly their perception of the link between Bantu culture and the apartheid system, the *Messiah* performances were also implicitly staking a claim for participation in a common society. For those who had been through missionary

institutions (the teachers and many in the audience), the immediacy of a performance would have allowed the music to evoke in a very direct way emotions and memories associated with the contexts in which they had first heard it, and thereby facilitated the construction of *Messiah* as a powerful symbol of what was now under threat. Mission education, whatever its faults and limitations, had given Africans much that they now valued highly, including a choral tradition that gave a prominent place to Western classical music, and *Messiah* in particular. In the Nationalist government's educational programme, there would be no place for performances of *Messiah* by African school choirs, and according to the tenets of its broader socio-political programme, Africans singing *Messiah* could be nothing more than 'imitation Westerners' – and this at the very moment when for the first time an African choir and conductor had been able to present it in the township.

Although, as mentioned earlier, I was not aware of these performances as such at the time I interviewed Mngoma, I did follow up his brief mention (quoted above: 195) of what he had done with the students who came out in protest following the dismissals:

CC: That's very interesting, you know, because so often reading about that period one gets this ambivalent attitude towards ... precisely because of what happened with things like the Eiselen Report and so on, one gets the idea that people wanted to move away from Western culture, for example, you know, because it was associated with ...

KM: With oppression ...

CC: The oppression and so on – but obviously if you were doing excerpts from the *Messiah* you didn't feel that in quite the same way?

KM: No, I always – right from those days I have felt very strongly that as South African I belong to both worlds.

(Mngoma interview, 1997b)

My comments now seem to me to suggest that I was reading back into the events of that time my awareness of debates about the role of Eurocentric culture that took place in a much later and quite different context. The performances of *Messiah* by the People's and My-Africa High Schools were seen as standing *against* an oppressive culture rather than being complicit with it. This is not simply because the schools owed their very existence to an explicit rejection of apartheid education, and in that sense anything they did would have been in opposition to it. It was much more because, by claiming ownership of *Messiah*, they asserted their own right to participate in musical activities originating in the sphere of Western culture. The stakes were high, at a time when the whole aim of Bantu Education, and the larger ideology to which it contributed, was ultimately to separate people out into independent cultural spheres: to make sure that as far as possible they – and their cultures – were kept apart.

'Starting a tradition' in Soweto

Since the People's and My-Africa High School performances of *Messiah* appear to have been the first actually to take place in the township, they could be seen as occupying first position in a series containing all subsequent township performances, and in that sense the start of a particular tradition. However, these performances had no direct successors, because the final implementation of the Bantu Education Act

towards the end of 1953 forced the My-Africa school to close. The Act contained a provision that

all black schools would have to be registered with the government, and that registration would be at the discretion of the Minister. This measure enabled the government to close any educational programmes which did not support its aims.

(Christie & Collins, 1982: 66)

According to Khabi Mngoma, 'that scuttled our efforts' (Makgabutlane, 1989: 16). These performances did not, therefore, start a tradition in the sense of being the first in a series of ongoing (perhaps annual) performances by the same group. It was a different performance that appears to have done that. Mngoma was certainly involved, but there is once again some confusion in the sources concerning whether he actually conducted, which choir performed, and exactly when it happened.

Mngoma seems to have taken some pride in his role as the initiator of this tradition (this in itself confirming again *Messiah's* importance for this community). When asked to supply information about his early musical activities, either in written form or in interviews, he frequently mentioned it. As in the case of the performances just discussed, I think the confusion arises partly from the many overlapping activities in which Mngoma was involved at this time, partly from the existence of these several accounts (each providing a different part of the story), and in this specific case also from the way researchers have interpreted his use of the phrase 'started the *Messiah* tradition'. A further layer of uncertainty arises from the fact that if this was indeed a 'tradition', it means that there were a number of performances, and it now seems to me that elements of later performances have not always been distinguished from those that were present in the performance that actually started the tradition.

In Manganyi's biography of Mphahlele, 'Mngoma' uses this phrase in connection with the activities of the Syndicate of African Artists: 'We had a school choir as well and I looked after the music. That was where we started the Handel's *Messiah* tradition by getting a few of the people to do solo work and the school choir to sing' (1983: 68). If 'the school choir' is in fact the People's High School Choral Society, then this is simply another reference to the performance previously discussed. However, it seems to me that this performance might have been conflated in Manganyi's account with another performance, which is the one Mngoma associates with the start of a tradition in all the other sources available to me.

The earliest use of this phrase which I could find was in a profile published in the *Rand Daily Mail* in 1964, which states that 'Mr. Mngoma had started the "Messiah" tradition among African choirs' (*RDM*, 1964). Burger quotes this reference, but takes it to mean that 'this monumental work by the German composer has ever since become a much revered piece of music among the black South African public, and a standard work of repertoire studied and performed by all African choirs of good repute' (1992: 84). This makes it appear as if *Messiah* ascended to its highly regarded position amongst Africans only after this performance, possibly even as a result of it. The history already covered above shows that this is not the case, and Mngoma's own account of his exposure to *Messiah* in his early life makes it clear that he was well aware of the status it already had in the African community. That is why I want to give his references to 'starting a tradition' the more specific and limited meaning suggested above: a series of annual performances by the same group.

The *Rand Daily Mail* article does not clearly specify a date nor the name of the choir with which Mngoma started the tradition, although the writer (Dora Sowden) does contribute her own personal memory of 'going (about 1953) to hear a most moving performance in a school hall. Mr. Mngoma was then working for the National War Memorial Foundation' (*RDM*, 1964). This last piece of information would place it after his time with the My-Africa School. Burger says that it was through the activities of the Chiawelo Community Centre Choir that he started the tradition (1992: 84), implying though not actually stating that he conducted it. This does connect with Sowden's comment, because the National War Memorial Health Foundation in fact ran the Chiawelo Centre, which served the community of Moroka. According to Mngoma, at the time of the closure of the My-Africa School the Foundation was looking for a manager and co-ordinator of programmes at the Centre. The Foundation's Dr Jean Lang was also on the Orlando High School Committee and knew Mngoma:

She appointed me at the end of 1953. She had been very fascinated with our performing arts programmes with youngsters at Orlando High Dr Lang felt it was the sort of thing they would like to have in Moroka.

(quoted in Makgabutlane, 1989: 16)

Although the phrase 'started the tradition' does not appear, the writer of the article in which this quote appears goes on to say, 'There were also singing groups at the centre, and the Handel's Messiah Singers were formed.' If any group performed *Messiah*, it must surely have been this one specifically named after it. However, in his article for *Musicus*, Mngoma writes:

I managed to establish the 'Townships Handel's Messiah Tradition' by persuading the Jabavu Choristers under Jabulani Mazibuko, to do Handel's *Messiah* annually.

(1998: 44)

This passage is significant for its use of the word 'annually', which confirms my interpretation of what Mngoma meant by 'starting the tradition'. It nevertheless appears to contradict both the previous sources quoted. Did the tradition start with Mngoma conducting the Chiawelo Community Centre Choir or the Handel's Messiah Singers, or with Mazibuko conducting the Jabavu Choristers? Fortunately, further pieces of information are available that suggest an answer.

Mngoma's 1993 CV (archival source) corroborates the *Musicus* account in crediting the Jabavu Choristers, but adds the significant detail that the venue for their performance was in fact the Chiawelo Centre. The full entry, under the heading of 'Cultural Activities', is: 'Promotion – Handel's Messiah Christmas Performance Tradition – Soweto – Chiawelo Centre with The Jabavu Choristers (Jabulani Mazibuko – Conductor from 1953).' With this I returned to my first interview with Mngoma, where I found a passage which suggested an explanation for these differing accounts. I quote it in full below, because it shows how easily a date can be misremembered (here Mngoma corrects himself, but perhaps on other occasions he did not do so), and also because it illustrates the importance of close attention to the detail of exactly what was said:

KM: We started the tradition of what they called the 'Soweto brand' of the *Messiah* ... [laughter] ... in 1959, and – no, no, earlier than that – in '55. You might have met or know of Peggy Haddon ...

CC: Yes ...

KM: She used to do accompaniments for our effort. I ran what was known as the War Memorial Health Foundation Centre in Moroka. We used to have in the Centre a lot of PT activities, and then music and other things and we had a choir, what was known as Jabavu Choristers.

(Mngoma interview, 1997a)

If Mngoma had stopped at the phrase 'we had a choir', or interrupted himself at that point to fill in another detail (as he did when he mentioned Peggy Haddon), or indeed if I had chosen to end my quotation there, it would appear as though the choir was that of the Centre, whereas in fact the Jabavu Choristers were an already-established township choir that came to the Centre to perform choruses from *Messiah*. Mngoma may well have directed other singing groups at the Centre: if so, Burger may have conflated them with the group that sang *Messiah* (the Jabavu Choristers). It seems to me that the names 'Chiawelo Community Centre Choir' and 'Handel's Messiah Singers' may be constructions by the authors, based on the fact that a choir did appear at the Centre, and that it sang *Messiah*. It seems extremely unlikely that there were three different choirs all singing *Messiah* at the Centre at about the same time, but I cannot entirely rule out the possibility that the Jabavu Choristers were given a different name when they sang in this context.

In my three interviews with Mngoma (1997a, 1997b, 1997c), I repeatedly brought the conversation back to this performance, both because at the time I had the feeling it was the first performance of *Messiah* by a Soweto choir and because there were several intriguing details that I wanted to clarify. Unless another source is indicated, what follows is my construction of the event, based on these interviews.

Mngoma first heard the Jabavu Choristers in one of the competitions at the Johannesburg Bantu Music Festival, of which he was Secretary at the time, and was impressed by their performance. According to a profile of the choir published in the magazine *Our Africa* a few years later, the choir had been formed in 1952 and won the Polliack Shield (Champion of Champions) at the Johannesburg Bantu Music Festival in 1953 (*OA*, 1958). *Bantu World* published a review of the 1953 Festival signed 'K.M.' (presumably Khabi Mngoma), which says:

For sheer beauty of tone so necessary for a successful musical performance, the Jabavu White City Choristers were best. This choir was one of the best choirs last year, but there was even greater improvement this year. Its free, flowing, full, flexible and forward tones were an object lesson for choirmasters It won all four sections it entered, and deservedly so.

(*World*, 1953e)

As a result of this, Mngoma sought out the choir's conductor, Jabulani Mazibuko. As Secretary of the JBMF, Mngoma had access to records which enabled him to trace Mazibuko to a house in White City, Jabavu. Initially, Mngoma seems to have thought of involving the choir in some of the activities associated with the JBMF, but 'it turned out that he [Mazibuko] himself was trying to find me in order to make a proposal himself to join hands in a community project' (Mngoma interview, 1997b). One of the things Mngoma wanted to do at the Chiawelo Centre was to promote musical performances, and so because of the proximity of Jabavu and Moroka he saw the opportunity of

attracting them [the Jabavu Choristers] in order to come and use the Centre, and one of the things they could do was give a performance of the *Messiah*,

coming from my experiences with how it caught on with the youngsters after our dismissal at Orlando High School He [Mazibuko] was willing to come. So we tried to work towards Christmas, but time was too short, so we put it on for Easter.

(Mngoma interview, 1997c)

This would date the first performance to the middle of April, 1954, which differs from Mngoma's own estimate of 1955 in the earlier interview quoted above, and from the date of 1953 given in his *Musicus* article (1998: 44). His 1993 CV (archival source) gives the date as 1953, as does the previously quoted profile of the Choristers, which says that 'in 1953 they presented a complete oratorio – Handel's "Messiah"' (OA, 1958). However, the brief discussion of this event in Mzilikazi Khumalo's essay (1995: n.p.), which seems to have been based on conversations with Mazibuko as well as Mngoma, gives 1954 as the date. I am inclined to accept 1954, because of the specific details about the Christian seasons supplied in Mngoma's third interview, and the probable corroboration of the date by Mazibuko in Khumalo's essay. 1953 was probably remembered as the time when the choir started working on *Messiah*, and it is always possible that they did perform something from it at the end of 1953, while the 'full' performance was presented at Easter. The earliest documentary evidence I was able to find was the following announcement, published in December 1954:

"Maestro" of Orlando [this is probably Khabi Mngoma] has written to me saying that the Jabavu Choristers, Johannesburg Music Champions, have been long preparing themselves for a special rendition of Handel's Messiah. This chorus [sic] will be heard at Moroka's Chiawelo Centre.

(*World*, 1954g)

Although this, too, could easily be a candidate for the first performance, it seems to me more likely this is the first one advertised to a wider audience. The actual 'first' performance, which I suggest happened at Easter, seems to have been intended not so much for the wider public as for the immediate community served by the Chiawelo Centre. The intention seems always to have been to have a performance at Christmas: it was the lack of time for preparation that caused its initial shift to Easter. The opportunity was presumably then taken at the end of the year to revert to the Christmas season, and to open it to a wider audience.

Different sources give different lists of soloists. My feeling is that this is the result of there having been several performances (precisely a 'tradition'), at which a variety of soloists sang on different occasions. As people tried to remember, many years later, the names of those who had been involved, it was difficult to distinguish exactly who had taken part in which performance. The best that can be done is to say that the singers listed in Table 6 (see below: 210) are reported (by one source or another) as having taken part in one of these early performances.

It will be seen that there is only one name on which all the sources are agreed: Grace Mngoma (Khabi's wife) sang the alto solos. Perhaps good alto soloists were as rare then as they are now, so there were no other names to suggest! Although Mngoma himself, as can be seen from the table, gave different names on different occasions, it was only in his third interview with me that he discussed the actual items that were sung, rather than simply mentioning the names of the singers. Because of this extra level of detail, it is this version which I would choose as the most likely account of what happened at the first in the series of performances. I quote the relevant passage in full below:

Table 6

	Mngoma interview, 1997a	Mngoma interview, 1997b	Mngoma interview, 1997c	Mngoma, 1998: 44	Khumalo, 1995: n.p.	<i>Our Africa</i> , 1958
Una Manye (S)					X	
Urbaniah Mothopeng (S)	X		X	X		X
Grace Mngoma (A)	X	X	X	X	X	X
Harold Khumalo (T)	X	X			X	X
Khabi Mngoma (T)	X					X
Ben Xatasi (T)		X	X	X		
Philip Guliwe (B)	X				X	
Louis Mgangi (B)						X
Mayo Miza (B)					X	
Lucas Scott (B)	X			X		

Now, my wife could do all the solos because she had learnt them – the alto solos – she had learnt them from the high school experience. Urbaniah could also do the soprano solos, in fact all the ones that were attractive – the standard ones. And Ben did two – the first aria, ‘Comfort Ye’ and ‘Every Valley’, and ‘But thou didst not leave his soul in hell’. And we didn’t have a bass then.

(Mngoma interview, 1997c)

It is interesting that although Mngoma on two other occasions mentions Lucas Scott as having sung bass, earlier in the interview quoted above he says: ‘Lucas Scott was not quite in it yet because he was a freelance singer – we got him to sing the bass part in Haydn’s *Creation* much later – six, seven years later.’

A similar situation exists with the accompanists, though with less variants. Although Mngoma frequently mentioned Peggy Haddon in this context, it seems unlikely that she could have played at the first performance. Firstly, in 1953 she won the UNISA Overseas Scholarship and proceeded to London and Munich for her further studies (Malan, 1982a: 153). Secondly, Mngoma also stated that his first contact with her was when she accompanied him in his Licentiate examinations, the first of which he worked on in 1956-7 (Mngoma CV, 1993, archival source). However, in his first interview with me he also mentioned the name of a certain Mr Woodroff, who he thought came from Australia. Woodroff’s involvement apparently came about because he was a Quaker and was contacted by one of the Foundation committee members who was also a Quaker. Mngoma said that ‘he was also a very good pianist,

he was always willing to come and help out' (Mngoma interview, 1997a). Khumalo, perhaps having been able to confirm this with Mazibuko, states plainly that 'in the first performance there was piano accompaniment provided by Mr Woodroff' (1995: n.p.). I am inclined to accept this, with the implication that Peggy Haddon's involvement started with later performances. She had vivid memories of working with African choirs, but she was unable to recall this performance (Haddon interview, 2000). Most of the details she did mention seemed to me to refer to the later 1950s and 1960s. In at least some of the later performances Haddon was joined by another Johannesburg pianist and piano teacher, Aida Lovell: 'We put her onto a Hammond organ' (Mngoma interview, 1997a).

For their first presentation, the choir was able to learn only a few choruses in the time available: 'I didn't reckon with the fact that the slogging – the learning of the music – would take such a long time. By the time the time came we only had learned five' (Mngoma interview, 1997b).

The choir did 'And the glory of the Lord', and the 'Hallelujah', and I think three others – I forget which the three others – anyway, there's one – oh, 'Glory to God', yes, Urbaniah did the recitatives that precede it, and then we did 'Glory to God'. But it took – the whole programme turned out to be rather short for the *Messiah*, and we had billed it as the full *Messiah* – people were expecting more. So at the end of it all, I think these people were hungry.

(Mngoma interview, 1997c)

To compensate for the shortness of the programme – in his *Musicus* article (1998: 44) Mngoma estimates it lasted about 45 minutes – a hat was passed round the audience so that people could write down what they wanted to hear again: 'inviting them to ask for encores' (Mngoma interview, 1997a): 'It turned out that they wanted the whole programme all over again' (Mngoma interview, 1997c) and so the length of the performance was effectively doubled!

The audience at that first performance was small: Mazibuko's memory was of twelve people (Khumalo, 1995: n.p.), while Mngoma thought 'it was just about a little more than the choir itself which was about 32, 35 or thereabouts' (Mngoma interview, 1997c). What is more significant, and was only mentioned by Mngoma in his third interview with me, was the make-up of that audience, and it is really this that makes the performance unique. After I had asked about the small audience, Mngoma made the point that in the circumstances 'to have an audience at all for *Messiah* was quite remarkable'. So far in this study I have emphasized the association of *Messiah* with elites of various kinds. In this performance, too, the organizers were members of the African middle class, and the Chiawelo Centre itself was an initiative that came from white liberal circles. In no way could the audience, however, be regarded as belonging to any kind of elite. Mngoma explains:

When I took over the Centre it was serving a squatter camp, and that's why the National War Memorial established the Centre there, to improve the lives and the lot of those people.

(Mngoma interview, 1997c)

According to Mngoma, the people served by the Centre lived in tin shacks ('shelters' as they were called) and were 'a mixture of the poorest of the poorest'. It was a community within which it would be difficult to find the requirements for any kind of organized activity, let alone those for a performance of *Messiah*. The Centre therefore provided the opportunity for a variety of activities aimed at improving the quality of

life for people who in many cases had probably come to the city hoping for exactly that. Amongst these initiatives were some that made a tangible difference to their lives in economic terms. Khabi Mngoma himself started cooperative schemes which involved collecting small amounts of money from each family and then going to the market and buying in bulk, thus providing fruit, vegetables and groceries at a more affordable price. There was also a nursery school and a youth club which included a lot of musical activity. It was these initiatives that provided the immediate context within which the audience approached and listened to the performance of *Messiah*. It became one of the activities through which the Centre aimed to make a positive difference in their lives. For people with little or no previous experience of *Messiah* or even of classical music, their predisposition to construct the performance in positive terms was without doubt greatly enhanced by the fact not only that the Centre had already proved itself in concrete terms, but that the same man who had launched the other initiatives was closely involved in this one.

Mngoma himself felt that the main reason why people came to the performance was sheer curiosity: 'Coming to the *Messiah* was just to see what this man is up to – he's got us involved in the grocery club, in the vegetable club ...' (ibid). This was not a case of people coming because they were already familiar with some of the music, or activities of this type, and knew clearly what to expect. Their expectations were more general but had nevertheless been formed by their experience of what the Centre had to offer them. Some might have heard from their children who came to the Centre about some of the musical activities Mngoma had started. Because of the other things the Centre was doing, 'they expected something good, something that would be stimulating for them' (ibid). The Centre became a focal point that people gravitated to at times when they had some free time, especially on a Sunday, which is when the performances always took place. It became a symbol of hope for a better life on several levels, and no doubt the meaning of the *Messiah* performance was constructed in accordance with this, both by the audience and the organizers, who were, Mngoma said, 'very heartened for those people to be coming' (ibid).

For the Jabavu Choristers the growth of the tradition started in this humble way also had more tangible benefits. As year by year they built up the number of choruses they were able to present, and became known to a wider audience, so their stature as a choir was enhanced. Very few African choirs were able, or had attempted, to present a complete oratorio, which is why the previously mentioned profile of the choir highlights this as one of their significant accomplishments (*OA*, 1958). Similarly, in the caption to a photograph of Jabulani Mazibuko which appeared in the *World* in 1957, the feature which is singled out as the choir's most notable characteristic is that they are 'the only people' who are able to sing *Messiah* 'the way it is supposed to be sung' (*World*, 1957). *Messiah* has become the vehicle through which they define their uniqueness and their status as a choir.

Ultimately, the tradition started by Mngoma would divide into two parallel streams, equally significant in their rather different ways. Conductorship of the Jabavu Choristers was taken over by the choir's leading tenor, Ben Xatasi. The 1958 profile mentions their plans to present *Messiah* 'again in Johannesburg during the Christmas season' (ibid). Through circumstances which will be discussed in the next chapter, as an indirect result of this the Jabavu Choristers joined with other singers from the townships to form the Johannesburg African Music Society, which for over a decade

gave annual performances of *Messiah* in the Johannesburg city centre. For his part, Jabulani Mazibuko became conductor of the Orlando Choristers, and together with Khabi Mngoma continued the tradition in the township itself. I have not been able to establish for how many years this was maintained: a photograph in *World* (1959c) shows Khabi and Grace Mngoma as soloists in a *Messiah* performance presented by the Orlando Choristers at the DOCC in April 1959. At this time, however, Khabi Mngoma was launching new ventures of his own, as a result of which *Messiah* would eventually receive greater exposure in Johannesburg's townships than than ever before. A discussion of these ventures will form the last chapter of my account of the 'African' *Messiah* (see below, Chapter 16).

CHAPTER 15: The 'town' Messiah – the Johannesburg African Music Society

In April 1959, several performances of Handel's *Messiah* took place in the Johannesburg City Hall which attracted unusually widespread publicity and attention. An estimated 11,000 people attended (*Transvaler*, 1960) and according to one account, 'Johannesburg music lovers went mad with delight' (*Star*, 1963b). The performances were considered sufficiently significant to warrant newsreel coverage, and were so successful that they initiated a series of annual performances stretching over the following decade. Performances by a variety of choirs had been a regular feature of musical life in the city almost from its beginnings (see above: 112). In her history of the Johannesburg Philharmonic Society, published at the time of these performances, Phyllis Scarnell Lean notes that since the founding of the choir in 1909, 'performances of Handel's MESSIAH seem to have been given almost every year near Christmas time' (Lean, 1959: 8). What, then, was the reason for this sudden burst of attention? It was the combination, in the context of a society shaped (or deformed) by apartheid, of *Messiah*, the prestigious performance space of the City Hall, a white conductor and orchestra, African soloists, and an unusually large and well-trained choir consisting entirely of African singers, performing for both white and black audiences.

The broader socio-political situation of South Africa at this time meant that these performances entered an exceptionally complex and fraught ideological territory, in which their significance could be constructed in very different ways from different positions. The available positions were becoming more sharply defined than ever before, and facing people with choices that were made more difficult because they involved not only a programme of political action but also a struggle over identities imposed, chosen, or negotiated. This was, in fact, a turning point in the history of twentieth-century South Africa. A space of three years (1959-1961) saw the formation of the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and the Progressive Party, British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan's 'winds of change' speech to parliament in Cape Town, the shooting of demonstrators by police at Sharpeville, the implementation of a whole range of apartheid laws, South Africa becoming a republic outside the Commonwealth, and the start of the ANC's armed struggle.

As these performances became established as an annual tradition, the story of their origins was told and retold many times. I have based my discussion on the printed programmes which have been preserved in the Strange Africana Library in Johannesburg (Programmes, 1959-1970, archival source), on reports published in a variety of newspapers, and personal reminiscences by some of the participants whom I was able to interview. In some of these accounts particular details are left out which affect the impression created by the whole, and in other cases details are supplied that appear to contradict one another. This is not only because of inevitable differences in perspective and the effects of time on memory, but also because this rapidly became the stuff of legend. Within four years, for example, estimates of the total attendance at the first performances rose from the 11,000 quoted above to 15,000 (*Star*, 1964a). Since the main outline of what took place is nevertheless clear, I have in this chapter

generally avoided the kind of detailed unravelling of sources that I undertook in the case of the Groote Kerk 'Hallelujah' and Khabi Mngoma's Soweto performances.

The story begins in the latter part of 1958, when the previously-mentioned proficiency of the Jabavu Choristers in singing *Messiah* came to the attention of a Johannesburg businessman, Leslie Dishy. He invited the Choristers to provide entertainment at a party for the African staff of his firm 'Sewknit' (which sold sewing and knitting machines). It seems that the singing drew an appreciative crowd in the street, as well as making a strong and favourable impression on Dishy himself. Among the pieces the choir performed was the 'Hallelujah' Chorus. According to one account 'Dishy said to them: "I will put you on the City Hall one day." They thought that was funny' (*Star*, 25 February 1963). Soon afterwards their conductor, Ben Xatasi, joined Dishy's staff, and this contact between the two men ensured that Dishy's idea for a City Hall performance by the choir was not forgotten.

Dishy was a member of the Memorable Order of Tin Hats (MOTHs), an organization which had taken on a significant role in raising money to support not only the ex-servicemen who were its members but also a variety of other charities. The method favoured by Dishy's local branch, the 'Desert Lily' shellhole, was producing shows. He thus had access to an organization likely to respond favourably to his proposal that the choir which had so impressed him with its singing of 'Hallelujah' should present a performance of *Messiah* in the City Hall. To organize this, the MOTHs decided to form a joint committee, chaired by Dishy, from two shellholes, 'Desert Lily' and 'Hole in the Wall'.

The conductor Joseph Friedland, recently returned to Johannesburg after studies in Europe, was invited to conduct the performance. The cover of the commercial record which was made of the 1960 performance states that he undertook it 'in the absence of an African conductor with sufficient experience in this type of work' ('Arias and Choruses ...', 1960, archival source). At some point a decision was taken to form a much larger choir. Some accounts suggest that this was part of Dishy's original idea (for example, *RDM*, 1965c), but one (*World*, 1959d) specifically attributes it to Friedland, stating that in his view the thirty voices of the Jabavu Choristers would be too few. The choirs of two churches were then invited to join the Jabavu Choristers: St Augustine's (Orlando West), where the conductor was Stanford Gxashe, and Christ the King (which had been Trevor Huddleston's church in Sophiatown) where the conductor was Michael Rantho. With the addition of some extra individual singers, in the end the choir numbered between 140 and 150. Assistance with the organization and coordination of the singers, as well as copying of scores, was given by various people involved with choral music activities in the townships, notably officials of the JBMF. Programmes over the years paid tribute to the important role of these 'African Choir Organisers': J.P. Tutu, Osborne Ferdinand, and Itala Monkoe.

For the solo parts, it seems that the choirmasters proposed singers from within their choirs or who were personally known to them, and these were then auditioned by Friedland. He chose two sopranos, Iris Letanka and Alice Mollson, the alto Mabel Modiga, and the bass Lucas Scott, while Ben Xatasi himself was given the tenor solos. The well-known tenor, Webster Booth, assisted in giving the soloists private tuition for the first performance. The instrumentalists are described in the programme as 'The Handel Orchestra'. This was a group made of up musicians who also played

in other Johannesburg orchestras. It had been in existence for many years, and had accompanied many different choirs in performances of *Messiah*. All the members of the orchestra were white, as was the organist Faye Smith (an American missionary).

The choirs worked independently under their own conductors and then came together for joint rehearsals with Friedland. These presented many logistical difficulties. For the first joint rehearsal, about a hundred singers were expected, but only about sixteen arrived. Transport turned out to be the major problem. In their efforts to make the venture work, the white organizers came face to face with the daily realities of life for their singers. Speaking to an interviewer a couple of years later, Les Dishy reminisced:

Africans work miles from their townships and get home later than other people do. When they do get home, they're tired, but they have to face household chores and cooking. Those who have the flair for choral work live miles from any central place to which they can be gathered.

(Star, 1963b)

So buses were organized to pick up and drop off the singers in the townships. To make it easier for people to attend, food and refreshments were provided at the practice venues. While that represented a major obstacle overcome, the preparations for the performance could not be insulated from other problems faced by the singers on a daily basis. Dishy continues:

Just when we wanted a full tenor section for rehearsal, we'd find two of them beaten up by tsotsis, two others detained, perhaps for some pass offence, and others delayed in the long bus queues at city termini. Often, dozens of times, we felt like hurling the whole thing in.

But they, and their singers, persevered, and the performances duly took place between the 8th and the 13th of April 1959.

Initial plans had been fairly modest, envisaging two performances. Racially mixed audiences were not permitted in the Johannesburg City Hall, so separate performances had to be organized for black and white audiences. However, as bookings were made and interest increased it was decided to add further performances. In the end such was the demand that a total of seven performances was given.

The response of the audience, both in terms of attendance and in appreciation of the performances, exceeded everyone's expectations. *The World* (1959d) reported that at the first performance for blacks there was a 'record crowd' of 1600, while the gala performance for whites was fully booked. As a result of this success, plans were made not only for a performance the following year, but also to put the organization on a more permanent footing. The singers in the first performance had been identified simply as 'combined African choirs', with or without the three individual choirs being mentioned. It was the following year that they were first described as the 'Johannesburg African Music Society' or JAMS, although they were also frequently referred to, especially in the townships, as 'the Messiah Choir', since this was the work for which they had been brought together. In 1960 the existing group was joined by the Mofolo Choristers and the choir of Christ the King, Meadowlands, so that the total number of choristers was around 200. From 1961 the soprano Anne Feldman became involved, initially as singing coach for the soloists and later assisting with the training of the choir. Their performance of *Messiah* in Johannesburg became established as an annual event, and in subsequent years they also sang in townships

along the reef, and undertook tours to Pretoria, Kimberley, Durban and Cape Town. In 1963 Joseph Friedland left for Israel and the conducting was taken over by Jeremy Schulman, who had recently retired as one of the conductors of the SABC Symphony Orchestra. From 1964 they began to present occasional performances of music other than *Messiah*, but it was Handel's oratorio that continued to be their mainstay.

Something that does not appear in the 'official' versions of the story is the fact that not everyone who was invited to participate by Friedland agreed to do so. Khabi Mngoma was one who did not. He told me that his initial reservations concerned the exclusion of black people from the City Hall: he felt he could not be involved in a performance that would not be open to all (Mngoma interview, 1997c). But even when it became evident that there would be performances for black audiences, he continued to feel that his position in the township could be damaged by becoming involved in an enterprise that seemed to be primarily about exposing African choirs to white audiences, and was very much under the control of white people. His concern was to build up something that could be ongoing in the township itself, both in terms of choral and orchestral work. His own ambitions as a conductor also inclined him to continue on his own independent path. So there developed what Mngoma referred to as the 'town' *Messiah* (undertaken by JAMS) and the 'township' *Messiah* (initially in the hands of the Orlando Choristers but later taken over by Khabi Mngoma's own Ionian Choir – see Chapter 16). Despite this rivalry, Mngoma acknowledged the value of the JAMS performances in terms of the exposure it provided for African choirs, and the rewards for the individual singers involved in it. Although he never allowed his Ionian Choir to become part of JAMS, he did not prevent individual singers from the choir participating, and several did so. The fear that this might prejudice township activities did not materialize: the singers returned to contribute their voices to the Ionians and other township choirs.

It is not often that performances in the classical field have created the kind of stir which the first performances of *Messiah* by the combined choirs in 1959 produced. The 1961 programme recalls 'an unforgettable experience' and mentions 'wave after wave of applause' at the end. A report in *The World* (1959d) describes the performances as a 'sensation' and states that 'inquiries are pouring in from other Reef towns to find out if it is possible for the combined choir ... to go out and sing for them'. The following week the newspaper carried an editorial on the subject, headed: 'After Kong – The Choir' (*World*, 1959f). It draws a comparison between the *Messiah* performances and the recently staged musical play, *King Kong*:

Just as the "King Kong" wonders were leaving Johannesburg for the Cape, a new wonder by African men and women was on again. This time it was not at the University Great Hall nor was it jazz-opera. It was a choir at the Johannesburg City Hall.

The element of novelty obviously played a role. While there had been African massed choirs before, and African choirs singing in the City Hall, and performances of *Messiah* by African choirs in the townships, and African choirs singing with orchestra, this was the first time all these elements were brought together. But novelty was not the only value, and others began to emerge more clearly as the performances continued in subsequent years.

For the choristers and audiences from the township, the scale of the performances was an important factor in its musical value, to which the large numbers of singers,

presence of an orchestra, backing of a large organ, and size of the venue all contributed. Michael Masote (Interview, 2000) recalls how at rehearsals Faye Smith had played on a portable harmonium, but then the time came for the dress rehearsal, with the orchestra and the City Hall organ: 'It was real exciting. I was still a student then, I was doing matric, and for some time I neglected my studies because of this excitement of sitting in the *Messiah* choir and with orchestra accompaniment.'

There was also a social value. The performances provided an opportunity for the singers to demonstrate their skills and establish their status in township society more generally. This was not only because of the support they received from their own community, but also because they performed for white audiences. Their achievement was recognized by those whom racial ideology defined as superior, who had for so long been posited as the bearers of the civilization to which black people must aspire, and in relation to whose standards black people would be seen as succeeding or failing. When I asked Sheila Masote (Interview, 2000) how she felt about the question of segregated audiences, she mentioned the mixed emotions that this had evoked.

It was an honour to play for whites. That's how reduced we were They never come to our concerts, now we have gone to them and showed them we can do it, and it was a success And also, wow, if you can sing for whites it means – and they applauded so much – it means we are up there, we are getting somewhere.

For most of those in the white audiences, it was their first exposure to an African choir of any kind, let alone one of this size, singing music of this kind, with this level of skill. Their reaction can be gauged from many of the reviews. The choir 'had a huge European audience stamping and clapping its enthusiasm at the end of the two-hour performance' (*RDM*, 1960). When the choir toured to Durban, the *Natal Mercury* (1963) commented:

Any production of *The Messiah* over Easter could expect an "appreciative" audience. The three packed houses that heard the J.A.M.S. interpretation, however, were taken completely unawares. They found themselves applauding for as long as five minutes, floor thumping and shouting when their hands became too painful to clap.

This surely goes far beyond the polite approbation that audiences composed of white 'liberals' might have been expected to produce for a performance that they felt it would not be fitting to disapprove, even if it was not quite up to the standards they were used to from white choirs. It represents a genuinely enthusiastic appreciation of the performers' achievement, suggesting both the power of the black singers to move their audience, and that audience's willingness to be moved, in ways that (for the duration of the performance at least) transcended the barriers that apartheid ideology was so determined to maintain.

Apart from reporting the audience response, the reviewers themselves provide a more detailed assessment. It seems that from the beginning Friedland was concerned not to give any opening to condescension. A reporter who attended one of the rehearsals reports him as saying: 'It must be sung so well that there will be no apologies ... Nobody saying, "Sorry, we had difficulties" ...' (*OA*, 1959). To a large extent he appears to have succeeded. The reviews in the newspapers aimed at a primarily white readership were overwhelmingly positive, and there seems to be general agreement that between 1959 and 1965 the standard of the choir steadily improved. All reviewers

were nevertheless faced with the problem of how (or whether) to 'take account' of racial difference in attempting to do justice to the particular qualities of this choir. Dora Sowden's review of the 1959 performance (*RDM*, 1959) exemplifies the difficult balancing act involved:

There may have been better performances of Handel's "The Messiah" in the Johannesburg City Hall. There has not, within my memory, been one more inspiring What was thoroughly African was the freshness and impulse of the singing. What was lacking in art was more than compensated in unspoilt simplicity, easy-flowing part-singing and remarkable power to express sorrow and joy.

It was rare, however, for the issues to be faced with the openness displayed by the reviewer in *Die Burger*, who heard the choir on their Cape Town tour at the end of 1964. Having pointed out what was lacking in the performance (technical and musical deficiencies of the soloists, and choral balance are mentioned) the reviewer goes on to say:

In spite of this the performance was one of the most enthralling and moving musical experiences that one could have. This writer and other audience members were literally brought to tears. It is naturally difficult to arrive at an objective, purely musical estimation of a Bantu undertaking such as this. The South African listener is all too aware of the cultural and organizational arrears that had to be made up. That this group could present a performance of notably high standard is in itself already something that borders on a miracle. A comparison with a similar undertaking by whites would not reveal the full extent of this choir's true achievement. How does one measure them, then, in a work of European high culture, according to Western musical standards?

(*Burger*, 1965; author's translation)

Having placed a question mark over the intonation, the last section of the review identifies four qualities 'in which they would equal and even surpass many white choirs': rhythmic cohesion, dynamic control, clarity of diction, and deep familiarity with the work as a whole.

Review after review describes the performances with words such as 'moving' or 'inspiring'. As suggested above, the qualities of the performance itself were not the only reason for this. A contributing factor was the realization of the odds which had to be faced; and if the assumption of a cultural backlog needing to be made up carries the danger of patronization, failure to recognize the real difficulties that were overcome carries the danger of minimizing the choir's achievement. But these reiterated words may be the surface markers of something deeper. For the black singers, this was on many levels a first experience, and the freshness of their encounter with *Messiah* may, paradoxically, have reinvigorated it for the white listeners, providing them with a new and gratifying experience of the value of their own culture. It also seems likely that for some, a factor contributing to the moving quality of the performance was a new-found awareness that 'they' (the members of the black choir) were not, after all, so different from 'us' (the members of the white audience, who may in many cases also have been members of choirs that sang *Messiah*). *Messiah* thus became the sign of much that linked the separated groups together. In the face of this, what could justify 'their' continuing exclusion from a common cultural (or social, or political) life? To raise such a question is inevitably to

confront the politics of the day, at the centre of which lay the Nationalist government's apartheid policy.

In considering in more general terms the ways in which these performances and their significance were constructed in relation to the political field, it must be recognized that the written comments that have been preserved largely represent a position which can perhaps best be labeled as 'liberal' within the spectrum of political positions of the time. This label was attached to segments of both the black and white populations, recognizing that, despite differences, there were significant points of ideological and social contact between them, the principal basis of which was their occupation of a similar (middle) class position within their respective racially-defined groups. On one level, the JAMS performances can be seen as taking place in this contact zone, enacting shared interests and demonstrating the possibility of cooperative activity. This 'liberal' discourse, however, does not speak only of itself: it was shaped by its awareness of the political discourse surrounding it, most notably that of the Nationalist government and that of the Africanists, against which the white and black liberal positions were most explicitly defined. Traces of this surrounding discourse can be clearly discerned in the way the various commentators use the JAMS performances as 'evidence' for the rightness of their positions. Two interrelated themes were particularly highlighted: the significance of JAMS as a revelation of the abilities of Africans, and as a manifestation of cooperation between black and white people.

In its treatment of the first theme, a passage from the previously-quoted editorial in *The World* (1959f) is especially illuminating:

What thrilled the listeners most was the fact that these Africans so entered the spirit of Handel in this oratorio as to bring the great choral work almost to life. This is a great achievement which shows that Africans can appreciate Western culture and assimilate it without in any way lowering its standards or turning it into a hybrid. Rather, they enrich it and bring it to fuller life. There could be no better and more timely answer to some light-minded [sic] members of Parliament who think that all the African is capable of doing is to go back to the cave and jungle and to play at the game of throwing bones and witch-hunting.

What is crucial here is the ascription by the editors of two qualities to *Messiah*: greatness and Westernness. *Messiah* in fact becomes the vehicle for fusing the two concepts. For the editors of *The World* these performances of *Messiah* provided ammunition in the fight against the apartheid government's attempt to impose an unwelcome unitary identity on all black people. The government's version of Africanness constructed it in terms of a traditional tribal and rural identity that had to be preserved in all its purity (Ross, 1999a: 116). This identity would both facilitate and justify the total separation (apartheid) that was the cornerstone of National Party policy. Against such ideas, the editors of *The World* seek to demonstrate, via their reading of these performances, the legitimacy of black aspirations to a different identity, from which Western elements are not excluded.

The programme notes for the 1959 performance leave no room for doubt about the supreme status of *Messiah*: 'Generations throughout two hundred years have lived and died in the firm faith that *Messiah* embraces all that is good and great in music.' This not only reflects a long tradition of valuation of *Messiah*, earlier moments of which

have been traced throughout this dissertation, but also ensures its continuation – and indeed its wider dissemination in the communities whose members were performers or listeners on these occasions. By giving a complete performance of *Messiah* with an orchestra in the City Hall, the African singers demonstrated their ability to reach what is here identified as the pinnacle of musical achievement. They showed that *Messiah* is not the exclusive property of those who belong to its culture of origin (that is to say, Europeans): rather, it is, as the programme boldly asserted, 'the common property of all mankind'. Underlying this statement is the assumption of a universal humanity characteristic of the liberal position.

This was not a view likely to be met with much sympathy by the government of the day. The first JAMS performances took place during the years that Deborah Posel identifies as marking a 'discrete second phase' of apartheid (1991: 227). It was characterized by a fundamental change in attitude towards Africans in the white urban areas. The influx control policy of the 1950s had operated by making a clear differentiation between rural ('tribal') and urbanized ('detrribalized') Africans, and sought to find some way of accommodating the latter within the 'white' urban areas.

But by 1960 this 'practical' premise was overturned, inaugurating a new commitment to levelling the status of all Africans inside and outside the 'urbanised' group Indeed, the very notion of 'detrribalisation' was scorned. Stressing the fundamental ethnic unity of Africans in the urban and rural areas, the BAD [Department of Bantu Administration and Development] expressly rejected the idea that there were 'two kinds of Africans', those who were urbanized and those who retained ties with the reserves.

(Posel, 1991: 232)

While there seems not to have been specific comment from the government on the performances, what it would have said is made sufficiently clear from the general position on such matters which was enunciated in Parliament during the same month as the *Messiah* performances. Several opposition MPs had urged the Government to give Africans, and particularly African choirs, a place in the proposed festival celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of Union. One stated: 'Their exceptional talent for singing should enjoy world recognition' (*World*, 1959e). Another maintained that this was an opportunity for South Africa 'to show that it could lead the continent of Africa by co-operating with the Non-European people in arranging the Festival'. Mr M.C. Botha was not to be persuaded by such arguments. Replying on behalf of the government, he insisted that 'the Bantu should be guided to celebrate in the reserves, in their own way They should be helped in their natural home to show what they had achieved within the framework of the Union, in farming, education, self-government and many other things that were typical of their own culture.' For those who were not on the reserves, the Minister of Finance, Dr Donges, provided his government's answer: 'There would be separate festivals for Indians, Coloureds and Africans.'

The implications of what we have seen in our discussion of the Bantu Education Act are here being played out. According to the government, Africans must be concerned with their 'own' culture, which is quite distinct from the culture of the Europeans. If these distinct cultures and the people who practice them must be kept apart, events such as the JAMS performances of *Messiah* would be suspect in a number of ways. In the first place, they brought Africans physically into the centre of the city instead of

locating their cultural aspirations in their own areas – if not the reserves at least the townships. Further, it was not only the mixing of black and white that was objectionable to the government (a matter to which I shall return shortly): the performances showed no respect for the supposedly 'natural' divisions – indeed, for Afrikaner Nationalists the 'God-given' divisions – between different African ethnic groups, each of which the government sought to connect to a different homeland. Instead, the singers appeared as a homogeneous African group involved in a common cultural activity. Finally, the performances presented the African singers with an opportunity to pursue an activity which was not at all part of their own traditional culture, but which had clearly become very important to them and in which they had become extremely proficient. They displayed to the world the refusal of at least some black people to be separated out into their own 'tribal' sphere. Indeed, some black political activists viewed involvement with traditional African music as playing into the hands of the government: Khabi Mngoma mentioned to me that he had been criticized on exactly these grounds when he had performed African music (Mngoma interview, 1997b). *The World* (1960) presented the continuance of the performances after the first year precisely as a link to the wider world: 'The African choirs of Johannesburg have joined a great European cultural tradition by deciding to sing the "Messiah" again this year. The tradition of singing the "Messiah" every year is followed in a number of cities overseas.'

The success of these performances showed that the desire of African people to participate in Western culture was not unrealistic or misplaced. This undercut the idea that Africans could not succeed in their attempts to become Westernized and were necessarily happier with their own traditional culture (an idea echoed, though for entirely different reasons, by those post-colonial theorists who insist that attempts by colonized people to 'mimic' the culture of the colonizer inevitably fail, and therefore reinscribe the oppressive relationship). By 1964, when the choir could no longer depend on novelty to make its impact, the reviewer in *The Star* (1964b) could write:

We can remember the day, not long ago, when this choir first sang the Handel oratorio, and sang it like a group of enthusiastic township people who had been well drilled and had practiced very hard. What last night's performance proved was that this is now a choir of the highest standards; so surely coordinated that it sings as one instrument, so deepened in musical understanding that it is sensitive to the subtlest nuance, and the smallest gesture of the conductor.

Nor was assessment of the choir as fully competent in this repertoire confined to the liberal English press. *Die Transvaler* (1964) carried the following: 'Last night this choir met the strictest requirements that can be set for a choir, namely the blending of the different voices. The JAMS Choir sings like one.' Commenting specifically on the 'Hallelujah' Chorus, the reviewer stated: 'It is a long time since I have heard this chorus with such conviction, feeling and discipline.'

For members of the white audience, therefore, or those who saw the newsreel in cinemas, or even simply read about the performances in the newspapers, there was the potential to unsettle the perceptions on which the grand narrative of apartheid depended in order to be convincing. In many ways this was a performance in which looking was as important as hearing. As William Beinart says of the 60s:

Most whites were unable to see black South Africans during this critical period of the country's history. Homelands, passes, group areas, social

amnesia, and powerful ideologies put them out of sight, literally and metaphorically Many of them came across Africans only as servants and workers.

(2001 [1994]: 186)

Here was created the possibility that white people might 'see' Africans in a new way, as more like themselves, as able to excel in areas where it had been supposed this was not possible. Much more literally than in a show like *King Kong*, Africans were here occupying a space hitherto occupied by whites: not just the physical space of the City Hall stage but the symbolic space of Handel's *Messiah*, as an icon of the greatest Western music.

Perhaps most seriously from the government's point of view, these performances represented on many levels cooperation between black and white, which returns us to the second of the two themes mentioned earlier. There was cooperation between the white and black organizers, but they at least worked behind the scenes. Not so the black choir and white orchestra, black soloists and white conductor: they staged their collaborative effort in an extremely public way. All this weakened the idea which had been so assiduously put forward in support of apartheid, that it was natural and desired by all. As Nigel Worden points out, the riots between Africans and Indians in Durban in 1949 had provided useful ammunition for the newly-elected National Party government in its claim 'that South Africans of different ethnicities could never co-exist peacefully' (1995: 105).

The performances of *Messiah*, in however small and limited a way, suggested a different possibility. A note in the 1964 programme, written from the point of view of the MOTHS, states that: 'The mutual understanding and respect between the choir and organizing committee is an object lesson in race relations of which the Desert Lily Shellhole is justly proud.' A review in *The Star* (1959) began by suggesting that Dr Aggrey, the famous African educationalist, would have smiled benignly on last night's City Hall performance His favourite analogy was to compare society in Africa to a keyboard with black and white notes. You could get music from the notes separately, he used to say, but the best harmony of all came when they were played together. Here was living proof of black-white understanding at an exalted level.

It was not only the white organizers and reviewers who noted this. Mr Joseph Zulu, one of the choristers, is reported as feeling that 'this kind of performance should be encouraged to continue because it improves relations between different racial groups' (*OA*, 1960a). In the next issue of *Our Africa* (1960b), the caption below a photograph of the performance reads: 'Probably nothing has done more to create good feeling between the races than the magnificent performance of "The Messiah".' The accompanying article reports the comment of an African high school principal who brought 218 students from Pretoria to hear the performance: 'This helps our feelings toward each other in this country very much.'

Such sentiments were felt by many to be sorely needed, but also sorely tested when, barely a week after the 1960 performances, police opened fire on demonstrators at Sharpeville. It was an inauspicious time for people to attempt to bridge divisions, but the *Messiah* performances serve as a reminder that such initiatives continued to exist, keeping alive the hope for a nonracial democracy rather than one in which race would

play a determining role, and preventing the composition (both then and now) of a 'black and white' story in which the two groups are simply enemies.

It was not only the Nationalist government that viewed cooperation with suspicion. When the editors of *The World* (1959f) highlighted the significance of the performances in these terms – 'It is yet another proof of what can be done by co-operation' – it seems likely that they had in their sights not so much the National Party as African nationalism. At this time, the Africanist position was represented most strongly by the newly-formed PAC, which held its first conference a matter of days before the 1959 performances. One of the crucial issues leading to the break with the Congress alliance was the question of cooperation with whites (as well as Indians): the Africanists were suspicious of the influence of whites in Congress and, growing impatient with the lack of political progress, decided that only Africans could liberate Africans. *The World* reported: 'Many would like to see an organization which is purely African in thought, method and action' (1959a).

Philip Frankel points out that in contrast to the ANC, which had its ideological roots in European conceptions of multiracialism, the PAC drew inspiration from the intrinsically African struggle against imperialism and colonialism which, at this point [the late 1950s] was reaching its historic apogee on other parts of the continent, further to the North. This reinforced the notion of political action 'by Africans for Africans' as the means of building the collective racial identities necessary for resisting the white state.

(Frankel, 2001: 47)

Of course, a performance of *Messiah* was hardly political action in the relevant sense. As we have already seen, however, arguments being carried forward in one area soon found application in others. As in the case of the government, no specific comment from the Africanists appears to have survived regarding the JAMS performances, but the implications of their position make it likely that African involvement in these performances would have been seen as upholding rather than challenging the status quo, particularly because it involved accepting a position of dependence on white organizers, instrumentalists, vocal trainer, and conductor. The seeking of recognition and approval by white audiences might have seemed as suspect as the aspiration to achieve in terms defined by a colonizing West. Khabi Mngoma told me of criticism leveled at his involvement with Western music because it was 'the colonialists' culture' (Mngoma interview, 1997c). *Messiah* itself could be seen as a colonial imposition which must be rejected, and its very prestige within Western culture could have made it particularly problematic from an Africanist perspective. If Africans uncritically give consent to the idea that '*Messiah* embraces *all* that is good and great in music,' they become complicit in the denigration of their own culture and reinforce European hegemony.

However, this particular 'cultural' line of argument seems to have become more prominent somewhat later than the years in which the Johannesburg African Music Society was active, particularly with the rise of the Black Consciousness movement in the 1970s, which began to target the more subtle forms of domination exercised by the liberal English-speaking group (Kavanagh, 1985, 21). Prior to this, the relationship between whites and the black middle class was the issue that drew greater attention. Even here, different emphases existed within the Africanist group. There was on the one hand Josias Madzunya, who called for 'God's Apartheid' (Africa for the Africans

and Europe for the Europeans), and on the other Robert Sobukwe, who 'called upon sympathetic whites to adjust their outlook in such a fashion that the slogan "Africa for the Africans ... could apply to them even though they are white"' (quoted in Lodge, 1983: 84).

In any event, it is clear that alignment with the Africanists did not at this stage necessarily entail a disowning of Handel, or even a refusal to participate in the JAMS performances. Amongst those who sang in the JAMS choir on various occasions were Urbaniyah Mothopeng and Sheila Masote, the wife and daughter of Zeph Mothopeng, whom we have met earlier as one of the teachers dismissed from Orlando High School in the early 1950s (see above: 194, 197). I noted in that context his involvement in many of the same musical circles and activities as Khabi Mngoma, and Urbaniyah Mothopeng told me that he had indeed included excerpts from *Messiah* with the choirs that he conducted (Mothopeng interview, 2000). His significance here is that he became a leader of the Africanist dissent that coalesced around a group of ANC Youth Leaguers in Orlando in the 1950s (Lodge, 1983: 80), which eventually led to the formation of the PAC. He presided at the first PAC conference in 1959 and was elected to its National Executive Committee, so he was undoubtedly at the heart of the Africanist movement at this time. Aware of this background, I asked Sheila Masote whether *Messiah*, as a Western work, was not something South Africans could better do without. She answered emphatically, 'Don't make that mistake' (Sheila Masote interview, 2000). In response to my suggestion that *Messiah*, given its European origins, might not be of much help to Africans, Urbaniyah Mothopeng said: 'Oh, it has helped us a lot'. Neither gave any hint that they had ever been tempted to think otherwise, or suggested that Mothopeng himself had done so. Sheila Masote also expressed appreciation for those whites who, during the dark days, 'would dare come this side' to provide training or instrumental accompaniment.

It nevertheless remains true that in general terms the Africanists stood in opposition to the more inclusive Charterists of the ANC, the group sometimes described at this period as the 'liberals' within the black political spectrum. The latter followed the principles of the Freedom Charter adopted at the Congress of the People on 26 June 1955. The section from the Charter headed 'The Doors of Learning and Culture Shall be Opened!' includes a statement opposing apartheid restrictions on the kind of activity represented by JAMS: 'The colour bar in cultural life, in sport and in education shall be abolished.' It also contains a statement implicitly supportive of African ownership of Handel: 'All the cultural treasure of mankind shall be open to all, by free exchange of books, ideas and contact with other lands' (quoted in Nolan, 1988: 223-4). The typically liberal universalism implied here echoes that which has already been noted in the JAMS programme (see above: 221). The link between white and black liberals is confirmed by the comments of the ANC's Secretary-general, Duma Nokwe, made only a few days before the 1959 performances (*World*, 1959b). He was explicitly defending, against attacks by the Africanists, the ANC's policy of cooperating with whites, and is reported as saying that the Liberal Party – which had been founded by whites, although it was not exclusively a white party (Saunders & Southey, 2001 [1998]: 105) – 'was now fully sympathetic with Congress policy'. Nokwe stated that the ANC 'had decided to co-operate with all races in the struggle for emancipation of the African oppressed'.

This inclusiveness, which in different forms appears throughout the long history of the ANC, eventually became an important element in paving the way for the political settlement of the 1990s. As Tom Lodge (2002: 5-6) reminds us, Nelson Mandela in his autobiography confesses to 'being something of an anglophile':

'When I thought of Western democracy and freedom, I thought of the British parliamentary system. In so many ways, the very model of the gentleman for me was an Englishman ... While I abhorred the notion of British imperialism, I never rejected the trappings of British style and manners.' On the eve of his departure from Johannesburg on a journey to address members of both Houses of Parliament at Westminster in 1993, he told journalists: 'I have not discarded the influence which Britain and British influence and culture exercised on us.'

From the point of view represented here (and Lodge is mindful of the way in which this is also a constructed persona), the Westernness, even the Englishness, of *Messiah* did not require Africans to disown it. The meanings and values contained within it could be put to use for purposes different from those of the Europeans who asserted exclusive rights to it. For Africans to reject it simply because it had European origins would be to impose on themselves the very impoverishment from which they sought liberation.

Harry Schwarz describes white liberalism in the South African context in a way which seems to fit the concerns of the organizers of these performances very well. He suggests that 'whatever this word may mean elsewhere in the world, in the Republic it means being against discrimination, supporting civil liberties and wanting to uplift under-privileged sections of the population' (Schwarz, 1984: 142). This last statement applies not only to the cultural opportunities that Dishy had initially sought to open up for the choristers, but also to one of the principal charities to benefit from these performances, the African Children's Feeding Scheme.

Schwarz makes his comments in the context of outlining the political position of Jewish South Africans. The Jewish presence in the *Messiah* performances was notable, most visibly in the persons of Joseph Friedland and later Jeremy Schulman as conductors, but much more extensively in the list of MOTH committee members who promoted the event. Many South African Jews had fought against Hitler, which explains their presence in the MOTHs. As in the case of Joseph Traunek (see above: 183), their experience of anti-Semitism inclined them to be opposed to all forms of discrimination and they became prominent in white liberal circles. Stephen Cohen (1984: 11-12) notes:

When the Government embarked on its programme of apartheid ... Jewry was singled out for castigation and rebuke. This was mainly due to the high proportion of Jewish individuals among the Government's most vehement and articulate opponents, like the Communist Party and the Congress of Democrats. The many Jewish names in radical groups at the forefront of the struggle against apartheid, testify to this: defendants in political trials; counsels for the defence of those tried in terms of the Suppression of Communism Act; and those involved in the founding of the non-racial Liberal Party in 1953, and the Progressive Party in 1959 which supported a qualified franchise.

William Beinart (2001 [1994]: 150) points out that there was significant opposition to the Nationalist government on the part of ex-servicemen generally. Their awareness that many National Party leaders had hoped for a German victory in the war

predisposed them to see apartheid legislation as a threat to the values for which they had fought, and for which their comrades had died. All of this suggests that the organizers might have been well aware of the implicit opposition between the *Messiah* performances and apartheid policy.

The liberal position of course had its limitations. Traces of the paternalistic, if not patronizing, attitudes of which white liberals are so often accused do surface occasionally. One of the reviews of the first performance asked: 'And who, by the way, tipped off the non-White audience that it is the tradition to stand for the crowning "Hallelujah" chorus?' (*Star*, 1959), as though this was not something they could already have known or established for themselves. Les Dishy is quoted as saying in an interview: 'The talent was there, for sure ... Guidance, tuition, organization – well, these just did not exist. So we took them in hand' (*Star*, 1963b). The 1966 programme says approvingly that members of the choir 'have relied implicitly on the good judgment of the MOTH Committee to arrange performances and nation-wide tours as well as guide them generally'. It was not only the organization that remained in white hands but also important aspects of the training, and the most visible aspect of control, the conducting. It could be argued that, for whatever reason, it was whites who had both the economic and symbolic capital required for mounting performances on this scale, and that sharing them was a necessary first step towards future equality. The contrary argument is that this domination of decision-making by whites simply preserved the racial hierarchy and failed to address the political causes of inequality.

In some cases, elements of self-interest simultaneously motivated liberal opposition to apartheid and ensured that it was kept within boundaries. Some English business interests opposed apartheid because labour unrest and resultant decline in foreign investment would affect profits. In 1960 a number of organizations representing commerce and industry (including even the Afrikaanse Handelsinstituut) published a joint memorandum urging the government to allow urbanized Africans greater freedom of movement and employment, and by removing the most obvious causes of grievance secure the support of what they called 'a loyal middle-class type Bantu' (quoted in Posel, 1991: 239). JAMS received considerable sponsorship from big business, particularly BP Southern Africa and the Anglo American Corporation. It could be argued that, while JAMS represented a challenge to the more obvious features of apartheid, it would not have received such corporate support without some complicity in more hidden forms of domination that co-opted the black elite in order to preserve racial-class privilege.

This may have been one of the reasons why political issues were not confronted explicitly in the discourse surrounding the JAMS activities. The way the programme for the 1960 performance introduces the choir of Christ the King, Meadowlands, is revealing. 'Its members were originally with Christ the King, Sophiatown. This separate group was formed when a number of members moved to Meadowlands.' Discussing the 'very difficult circumstances' under which the choir has to rehearse, the programme states: 'They cannot find suitable premises in Meadowlands, and more often than not it is in the open air. If it is not too windy, candles can help the choristers to read their music.' This politely effaces the responsibility of the agents of apartheid for their difficulties, making them sound like an unfortunate accident rather than the direct result of the destruction of Sophiatown and one of the most notorious

forced removals of the apartheid era. No criticism is voiced, either, of the requirement to have segregated audiences, though the organizers may have regarded this as something that simply had to be accepted under the apartheid government and perhaps a small price to pay when set against the material and symbolic advantages of having the performances in the City Hall. It is true that a hall of comparable size, facilities and status could not be found in the township, but this too was not an unfortunate fact of nature but the result of socio-political factors, as was the town/township divide itself.

It was above all the failure of the liberals to prevent the advance of an increasingly determined and ruthless apartheid system into every corner of life that gave credibility to more radical positions. Sharpeville is often seen as the defining moment in this regard:

Prior to 21 March 1960, the overwhelming majority of South Africans opposed to apartheid – indeed, most people of global repute – still believed that the country's deeply entrenched racial problems were tractable and could be resolved by the application of good civic sense lavished with a dose of mutual goodwill. Sharpeville rudely shattered this illusion.

(Frankel, 2001: 180)

The kind of initiative represented by the JAMS performances can therefore be seen as part of a political culture that was powerless to bring about fundamental change. Instead of helping to turn back apartheid, the JAMS performances eventually became its victims. In 1965, the performance of *Messiah* was forced to confront the system directly. Government Proclamation R26 of 1965 had the effect of tightening control in two areas which had long been of concern to apartheid legislators. Its provisions are summarized by Muriel Horrell (1967: 292):

Mixed audiences or mixed casts are prohibited at places of public entertainment except under the authority of a permit; and, unless a permit is obtained, a public hall in a group area proclaimed for members of one racial group cannot be hired by members of any other group.

On both counts, the *Messiah* performances turned out to be vulnerable.

The organizing committee applied to present two performances on Ascension Day, a matinee for a black audience and an evening performance for a white audience. Permission was refused. The committee at first assumed that the problem was the black audience in the white Group Area, so they proposed that the matinee as well as the evening performance should be for whites. Inconsistently, a permit was then given for the matinee, but still not for the evening performance. It seemed that the real problem was the presence of two groups belonging to different races on the stage at the same time. As an urgent last-minute compromise, a proposal was put to the Minister of Community Development, Mr P.W. Botha, that the *Messiah* performance would take place with a black conductor and a lone white organist. With barely twenty-four hours to go, permission was given. The matinee was cancelled so that the conductor (Michael Rantho) and organist (Howard Bryant) could rehearse with the choir in the afternoon.

The government's action sparked almost as much outrage as the initial performances had sparked enthusiasm; but whereas the enthusiasm entailed at most an implicit criticism of aspects of apartheid policy, the outrage was explicit. *The Rand Daily Mail* was particularly outspoken. One issue (1965a) carried a report on its front page that

began: 'The latest victim of South Africa's no-mixing rule is the long-dead composer, Handel. His "Messiah," due to be performed in Johannesburg on Thursday, has fallen foul of the Government.' The next day an editorial, headed 'What a Madhouse!' (1965b), referred to the 'lunatic muddle' over the *Messiah* performance, and the 'fantastic regulations' according to which permits were given or refused. A week later, it carried a major article on JAMS by Dora Sowden (1965c), which began:

With one stroke of the pen, the South African Government struck a blow this week that crippled six years of painstaking build-up by the Johannesburg African Music Society. It struck a blow at musical achievement which is not likely to recover, and a blow at our human dignity that will leave it more tarnished even than it has lately been in the cultural field.

In these events there was not the violence and physical suffering which apartheid policy did not hesitate to inflict in other contexts, but its attempt to make every aspect of life conform to its singular story nevertheless shows another kind of ruthlessness. Dora Sowden (1965a) is at pains to emphasise that the reason for the combination of black choir with white orchestra, 'was not any aim to break the Colour Bar. It was pure necessity. There is no African orchestra available.' She laments that JAMS, 'a purely music-loving, music-promoting body, has now become bewilderingly involved in politics.' But whatever the intentions of its organizers, the JAMS performance of *Messiah* could no more escape from politics than any other aspect of life under apartheid. Perhaps, then, the clearest confirmation that these performances did after all constitute an implicit challenge to apartheid comes from the actions of the very people who might be expected to be most sensitive to such a challenge: those who administered the day-to-day workings of the system. Perhaps, too, by revealing the lengths to which they were willing to go, their treatment of the JAMS performance may have provoked or strengthened the resistance of at least some in the white community.

That this may have been the case is suggested by the fact that the authorities did not entirely succeed in putting a stop to this venture in musical cooperation that crossed the racial divide they were so determined to entrench. JAMS was able to find a new home in St Mary's Anglican Cathedral. Leslie Stradling, Bishop of Johannesburg, replaced the Mayor as patron of the performances. His message printed in the 1966 programme expresses his feeling that 'the Cathedral will form an ideal setting for the performance. Not only is this basically a religious work, but in the house of God there are no arguments about who is welcome to sing or to listen to the singing.' The performances continued to take place at St Mary's until they came to an end in the early 1970s.

CHAPTER 16: *The Ionians take the lead*

By the late 1950s Khabi Mngoma felt that most of the choirs performing Western music were not doing so adequately. They had reached a kind of ‘ceiling’, leading to a situation of ‘musical stalemate’ (quoted in Burger, 1992: 87). He was particularly aware that their performances would not be regarded as acceptable in Europe, in the event of these choirs going on tour, as some were being invited to do. The main problem was intonation, and was largely the result of rehearsing and performing without instrumental accompaniment.

When Mngoma became Cultural Officer for the Johannesburg Non-European Affairs Department (NEAD) in 1957, he therefore set about remedying the situation in two ways. Firstly, he started developing an instrumental ensemble that could accompany the oratorio choruses that formed the staple diet for so many choirs. He started taking lessons in violin and cello himself, and passed on what he had learnt to his own pupils, sometimes later on the same day (Makgabutlane, 1989: 16). A string orchestra was formed which eventually constituted the nucleus of the Ionian Orchestra. Secondly, he formed a ‘model’ choir that he could train to embody the high standards of performance (including correct intonation) which others could then observe and emulate:

I called this choir the Ionians. This was supposed to be a central choir that would draw members from different choirs in Johannesburg, especially church and community choirs that took part in the Johannesburg festival [JBMF].

(Mngoma, quoted in Makgabutlane, 1989: 16)

It is not necessary here to trace in detail the various stages by which a variety of earlier vocal and instrumental ensembles eventually combined to form the Ionian Music Society: this information can be found in Burger’s thesis (1992). Indeed, the first several years of its existence do not directly concern us as they contain no performances of *Messiah*, which makes the Ionian Choir different from every other choir that has appeared in this history. It is not difficult to guess the reasons for this, however. Other choirs, such as the Jabavu Choristers and JAMS had already presented *Messiah* with considerable success, and by deliberately introducing new works, Mngoma could distinguish his new group from all others. Further, his work with the NEAD had always included an educational component, and the expanded repertoire served this educational function both for singers and for audiences. The Ionians thus produced ‘first’ performances (by an African choir) of an impressive number of major choral works. The programme for a concert which they presented in Durban in 1970 (‘A Feast of Choral Music’, 1970, archival source) gives a list of these works, with the years in which they first performed each one. *Messiah* appears in eleventh place, with the date 1968. However, there are newspaper references to the Ionian Music Society performing *Messiah* already towards the end of 1967 (*Ilanga*, 1967; *World*, 1967), and Burger (1992: 383) also mentions a programme for a performance of *Messiah* dating from 1967. Michael Masote, a member of the Ionian Orchestra, also remembered 1967 as the year of ‘the Khabi *Messiah*’ (M. Masote interview, 2000). An undated programme for one of their performances, possibly the first, says that ‘Handel’s THE MESSIAH has been done well often enough – which is one reason why we must do it too’ (Ionian Music Society, n.d., archival source).

Thanks largely to Khabi Mngoma's own efforts in learning and teaching the violin and cello, this would almost certainly have been the first time a choir was accompanied in *Messiah* by a group of African instrumentalists, although with hindsight he described the Ionian Orchestra in its early days as 'quite a ragged regiment of instrumental players' (Mngoma interview, 1997b).

A review of what was possibly this first Ionian performance of *Messiah* makes virtually no comment on the composition as such, or their treatment of it, but commends the Ionians' performance in general terms: 'The harmony, tone, control and balance, interpretation, delivery, blending of human and instrumental nuances; all gave a really impressive recital that was moving and meaningful' (*World*, 1967). The review does, however, give an indication that the Ionians had achieved their goal of taking a leading position amongst choirs in the townships of Johannesburg:

Here is a choir which can take its place with credit in any hall and any audience in this country and abroad This will be a powerful boost for classical music in our community and will raise the standards of our local choirs.

It might equally be said that performance by this choir would be bound to give a powerful boost to *Messiah*'s familiarity and status in the local communities, and indeed, once the Ionians had taken it up, it established a regular presence in their programmes, while other works continued to come and go.

In their mixed programmes of choral music, excerpts from *Messiah* were frequently included. An example is the aforementioned concert in Durban ('A Feast of Choral Music', 1970, archival source) where approximately a third of the programme is devoted to *Messiah*. It appears that the Ionians managed to continue expanding the repertoire even within the boundaries of *Messiah*, as their choices include (alongside 'And the Glory of the Lord' and the inevitable 'Hallelujah') some of the more difficult and less often performed items, such as 'And he shall purify', 'His yoke is easy', and 'Let us break their bonds asunder'. But the complete oratorio, too, was frequently performed. In some years they presented a number of complete performances in different townships along the Reef, as well as during their tours to other parts of the country. Their itinerary for the second half of 1969 shows *Messiah* scheduled in Brakpan on 30 November, Kagiso on 7 December and 'home' at the YMCA in Orlando on 13 and 14 December (Ionian Music Society, 1969, archival source). This appears to have been a series of performances prepared for the Christmas season, but the Ionians' familiarity with *Messiah*, and presumably audience demand for it, was such that it became an almost year-round activity, interspersed with other music. Their itinerary for the second half of 1974 lists performances on 15 August in Florida, 18 August in Coronationville, 15 September in Orlando West, 6 October in Daveyton, 20 October in Kliptown, and 1 December in Orlando (Ionian Music Society, 1974, archival source).

A detailed examination of their activities is beyond the scope of the present discussion, but it is clear that, in the work of the Ionian Music Society, not only the 'Hallelujah' Chorus but the whole of *Messiah* had now become a central feature of the Western repertoire of African choirs. Indeed, the Ionians gave more frequent performances of it than any of the choirs considered in the chapters on the 'English' *Messiah* (or, to my knowledge, any other choirs from the English community in this later time period, most of which have been content to give *Messiah* its annual outing

at Christmas or Easter). Sam Shabalala, who sang with the Ionians and became deputy conductor to Mngoma, said that ‘we lived by performing the *Messiah*, the way it is popular, we performed it all, every year’ (Shabalala interview, 1997). He recalled that the choir was very frequently invited to give concerts at churches on a Sunday, in order to raise funds for the churches – indeed, to such an extent that ‘we even stopped going to church – our church was Ionian Choir!’ According to him, *Messiah* was ‘in great demand by all the churches’, and even when the complete work was not presented, excerpts were ‘always on the programme, always’. In view of this, the Ionians must be accorded the leading position in the entire South African history of *Messiah* that has been examined in these pages.

Khabi Mngoma was the one conductor I was able to interview whose performances of *Messiah* fell within the period under consideration. Since he had his own ideas on why *Messiah* had become so popular amongst African people, as well as on what it had meant to people who took part in his performances, a consideration of these ideas forms a fitting conclusion to this account of the establishment of the ‘African’ *Messiah*. They are presented here not as definitive answers: to establish the truth of some of his suggestions, further research would be needed, beyond the scope of this thesis; nor are they taken to be ‘representative’ of the views of all African conductors, or of all those who performed and listened to *Messiah* in the African community. They do, however, represent the considered opinions of someone who had a longer, deeper and wider experience of *Messiah* than most, and his rare ability to reflect on his own practices and to articulate feelings and attitudes relating to music make his observations uniquely valuable.

Mngoma said that the first thing which encouraged him to perform *Messiah* with his own choirs was the response he had always observed: especially when community choirs sang it, there was always a very positive response from the audience (Mngoma interview, 1997b). He recognized that this may have been partly because people had heard it before, but he felt this familiarity with it was not the whole story.

On the level of musical materials, Mngoma felt that the main thing that appealed to African singers was the texture. He compared the polyphonic texture of *Messiah*’s choruses to the call-and-response patterns of traditional African music:

One of the greatest textures among black performers, especially with singers, folk singers, is this antiphony – call and response. It is this great human factor involvement of interacting with other people, which, I think, made it so attractive for people.

(Mngoma interview, 1997b)

He also referred to aspects of tonality. *Messiah* is primarily diatonic, and the few modulations are to closely related keys. This made it accessible to people familiar with a folk music tradition that does not include chromaticism or modulation as such (ibid). He also felt the straightforward rhythms and the use of repeated motives made it easier for singers to come to grips with the music.

It seemed possible to me that Mngoma’s own involvement with African music (and his investigation of it in an academic context after his appointment at the University of Zululand) might have made these associations more salient for him than for many of the singers involved in his earlier performances, or the audiences who heard them. Nevertheless, his willingness to find such points of correspondence indicates his

desire to integrate aspects of Western and African culture into a unified identity, a desire which, as we have seen, was certainly shared by many members of the mission-educated elite, and had been at least since the 1930s (see above: 169). Mngoma always insisted that his identity was determined by his cultural occupation of these two worlds. He was as unwilling to relinquish his involvement with Western music as he was to allow it to displace or devalue African music. The very name of the Ionian Music Society indicates Mngoma's commitment to training choirs to sing Western music, since the Ionian mode represents the diatonic major scale which Mngoma felt provided the basis for Western music and its theoretical formulation: 'everything seems to derive from it' (Mngoma interview, 1997a). He was adamant about the 'importance of Western music to *all* music in terms of understanding and analysis'. His performances of *Messiah* may thus be taken to represent an essential aspect of his identity, without this having to entail exclusion of the 'other' that has so often been seen (from both sides of the divide) as incompatible with it.

Beyond the appeal of the musical materials, and his identification with Western music more generally, Mngoma pointed to the message which he understood to be conveyed by *Messiah*. He felt it was very strong and very pertinent at the time, 'very necessary to sustain the morale of communities' (ibid). This was partly connected to the strength which people found in their Christian faith, and the 'power that the church wields in African communities' (ibid). But it was also partly a matter of particular understandings of the text that were activated by the broader political context:

KM: Some of the choruses were so blatantly political and pertinent to the situation.

CC: Oh?

KM: Yes – 'Let us break their bonds asunder': that I always found choirs sang with such vigour, and ...

CC: So they were quite aware of ...

KM: I think they – even though nobody had told them – they could actually in their own minds decide whose bonds they would be breaking asunder.

CC: Really?

KM: Yes. No, that was always very popular.

(Mngoma interview, 1997b)

As I later realized, this interpretation actually rests on a misunderstanding created by an ambiguity in the text. This chorus is preceded by the bass aria 'Why do the nations so furiously rage together?', which ends with the words: 'The kings of the earth rise up, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his anointed.' Then the chorus sings: 'Let us break their bonds asunder.' It is easy to regard these bonds as emanating from the kings of the earth, and they can therefore stand for the oppressive forces at work in the singers' own socio-political environment – in this case, the system of apartheid. The only problem with this is that in the original Psalm from which this text is drawn, these words are *spoken* by the kings of the earth, and it is the bonds of the Lord and his anointed that they are attempting to break. This realization would make it somewhat harder for the singers to identify with the rebellion. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that to some extent Jennens's use of the Psalm text as it appears in the Book of Common Prayer invites this misunderstanding, since by omitting the crucial word 'saying' before the words of this chorus, it fails to make clear that these are the words of the kings. (Indeed, can we be sure that Handel

understood this?) When the chorus is performed as an excerpt, or in a complete performance without the preceding aria – as, for example, in the Ionians' Durban programme of 1970 ('A Feast of Choral Music', archival source) – it is even more likely to be understood in a way compatible with the interpretation Mngoma suggests, because there is then no indication at all of whose words these are. The 'us' who break the bonds becomes indistinguishable from the 'us' to whom a child is born in Part One. It is therefore not surprising that it should be regarded as a choral equivalent of the following tenor aria, 'Thou shalt break them', which does indeed talk about God's power overcoming all opposition.

I spoke to Mngoma's daughter, Sibongile Khumalo (one of South Africa's leading singers), before the above-quoted interview in which he referred to 'Let us break'. I mentioned the chorus to her because of its appearance in a different (and much later) context, but this immediately reminded her of her father's performances, and in particular the fact that 'the selection of the works he did had a lot to do with ... the ability of the human spirit to overcome' (Khumalo interview, 1997). She said that 'the choruses or the arias that were always emphasized and worked on particularly hard, were the ones that had that kind of message.' This clearly evoked strong memories, and as she recalled scenes from her youthful past, she sang over certain phrases. Her emphasis on the word 'break' showed her understanding of the intensity that had informed Mngoma's interpretation, but it also allowed her to move from the chorus to the aria in the space of a few sentences (represented by the ellipsis in the following extract), suggesting that the meaning of the two pieces could be understood in the same way:

Yes – now that I think of it – and I'm hearing that 'Let us break their bonds asunder, let us break' – break, let's *break* their bonds asunder It comes back, it comes back so vividly. It's really, it's very, very – I can actually hear it, I can actually hear it sung with so much spirit and fire and vigour, and anger. Yes, in fact I can – the *breaking*, the – 'Thou shalt dash them, thou shalt dash them with a rod of iron'.

This destruction of the enemy is followed by the celebration of triumph in the 'Hallelujah' Chorus. The associations and feelings which infused 'Let us break' could thus also have informed the performance of this most important item, seen as the hoped-for victory over oppression. Given the centrality of this chorus, the meaning attributed to it is very likely to have been the predominant meaning attributed to *Messiah* as a whole. To perform *Messiah* was to express the hope – perhaps the conviction, given the confidence of the music, or perhaps the faith, given its Christian text – that the forces of oppression would eventually be overcome through the work of the Messiah. Within the Christian framework, of course, Jesus was understood to be the Messiah, but this did not preclude the collaborative action of an earthly liberator also, any more than the idea of God as King prevented the collaborative action of a human monarch. When I asked Mngoma specifically how he saw what he referred to as *Messiah's* 'strong and pertinent message', he said:

Well, I think it was the hope that eventually a Mandela would emerge out of this situation. Nobody knew how it would happen, but there was a feeling that such an atmosphere, such activity, will shoot up, will precipitate a leader who would have got all these things together as inspiration, and will be able to formalize and say the right things that everybody – and crystallize the sort of

corporate feeling of society, especially the black society.

(Mngoma interview, 1997b)

If I understand him correctly, Mngoma was suggesting that to perform *Messiah* in this context was to broadcast a message, to share a dream, of liberation from the bonds of oppression, and this could create a social, political, and spiritual environment propitious for the realization of such a dream. But for Mngoma it was not only the message but the activity itself that was effective, because it was collective and therefore integrative, and ultimately humanizing. He saw this as characteristic of group music-making in general: by interacting with others and making their own contribution to the whole, people are brought into relationship with others and so become bonded in human solidarity. This attractive vision has often been claimed as characteristically 'African', and it may well be Mngoma's experience of African music that encouraged him to formulate it in this way. What he refrained from doing was then to play this off against the individualism supposedly characteristic of Western music (and society) and thereby open the door to an inversion of the kind of valuation through which the colonialists had first denigrated African music. Mngoma refuses to think in terms of these oppositions, preferring to grant *Messiah* (its Western provenance notwithstanding) an honourable role in processes which can touch all people. I leave to him the last word in this Part of the thesis, which has been so much concerned with his work:

Especially with these antiphonal textures you have to come in precisely at the right time and start your phrase precisely at the right time and complement the next person. So you find it has this homogeneous, integrating effect, that you reach out to the next person and if you manage it spot on you feel you've been really part of the whole The next person reacts with them in this way, the same pitch, they complement each other, the motives are usually the same, somebody else will do the same, so that has a great integrating effect It's humanizing in the sense of species-integrating, species in terms of, perhaps, culture – but the human species also, because you could be black or white, if you did *Messiah* well you're part of this.

(ibid)

CHAPTER 17: Concluding

A first story: 'England' into 'Africa'

Wherever in South Africa the British formed a settled urban community, *Messiah* was soon found. It became established initially through a series of high-profile performances that were either associated with important events in the life of the community or causes that were important to its members. In time, performances became important events in themselves. They were promoted primarily by the choral societies that were eventually formed in each town. *Messiah*, or a selection of items from it, was frequently the first choice for performance by a new choral society, and the success which invariably attended such performances inclined them to repeat it on a regular basis, and inclined their successors to follow the same pattern. Such events were seen as significant 'milestones' in the ongoing story of each local community, as the first stages of a process which it was felt to be important to continue, the beginnings of a tradition that should continually be developed until *Messiah* in South Africa could match the image of *Messiah* as it was known in England.

Though it might always have been a possibility (in principle) for the British settlers to leave behind aspects of their familiar culture in favour of new possibilities created by themselves or adopted from the indigenous inhabitants of the areas where they settled, this was not in fact what happened in the communities we have considered. Firstly, they maintained a strong sense of England as 'home', and its culture was therefore their culture. Since 'home' was now very far away, a performance of *Messiah* undoubtedly provided them with a means of reconnecting with the culture that they had left behind. It was something familiar and comforting in an environment that often seemed foreign and hostile, especially in the early days of settlement. It was better suited for this purpose than most other music because its frequent performance in England had not only made the music itself familiar to a large number of people, but also associated it with a wide range of other familiar features of English life, such as the seasonal remembrance of Christmas.

Secondly, the settlers were convinced that British culture was superior to any other, and thus their concern could only be to recreate as much of that culture as possible in the new setting: anything else would be less than the best. *Messiah* was valorized simply by belonging to that culture, but again it was not just one item amongst others: it occupied a position of unique fame and prestige within that culture, being regarded as the greatest work of the greatest composer. Indeed, *Messiah* could be cited as unassailable evidence of the superiority of British culture. There was thus an imperative to perform *Messiah*, in whatever form might be possible, aiming at ever more complete and ever more frequent performances, the establishment of an annual tradition representing the culmination of this process. As a tradition, the performances of *Messiah* then formed part of those observances that helped to define the community's identity. Alongside this was the imperative to approach ever more closely the conventions and standards of performance established in England.

These two imperatives were to some extent in conflict, since a fledgling colonial community could not hope to match the resources available in the metropole. In the

early days, to perform *Messiah* was therefore almost by definition to perform it inadequately: the choir would probably be considered too small, there might not be an orchestra, one or more soloists might lack professional training or experience. Almost without exception, however, the first imperative took precedence: something of *Messiah* was better than nothing. Thus Cape Town (in 1830), Durban (1854), Bloemfontein (1866) and East London (1881) began with just the 'Hallelujah' Chorus. Grahamstown (1845), Port Elizabeth (1860), Queenstown (1869), King William's Town (1879) and Kimberley (1873) began with a selection of choruses and solo items. Pietermaritzburg (1864) and Pretoria (1883) began with complete performances. Johannesburg (1889), the last to arrive, was the first to begin immediately with a series of annual performances. All these early efforts were hailed by reviewers as representing significant achievements on the part of the musicians, and although the conductor and soloists might be visitors, the chorus was always drawn from the local community, and this facilitated the representation of the performance as an achievement of that community, and therefore a stage in its progress. It could also be represented as symbolizing the status of one town in comparison with others, particularly its closest rivals. To perform *Messiah*, and to perform it well, could be a source of considerable civic pride. It could be represented as one of the signs that a colonial community was worthy of recognition by the metropole, whether this recognition was sought for the purposes of being granted self-rule (early Cape Town) or assistance and protection (early Grahamstown and Johannesburg) or to enhance commercial exchange (the Kimberley Exhibition).

Because of *Messiah*'s prestige, a performance of the whole work (or, in the early days, any part of it) was regarded as an important occasion. In addition, because of its celebratory character, many performances were given in the context of celebrating other important occasions in the community (from the dedication of the organ at the Groote Kerk to the coronation of the British monarch). Many other performances were given for the benefit of particular charitable causes that were important to the community, and especially to the elite who saw their involvement as a way of confirming their status. For all these reasons, musicians would be interested in joining forces to mount a performance, and members of the community would be interested in attending. This meant that early performances often provided the only occasions on which the musical resources of a given community were combined, which undoubtedly played in role in ensuring that the musical impact would be considerable. It also meant that audience numbers were typically high, reinforcing people's sense of the importance of the occasion as well as its success. *Messiah* performances were therefore particularly memorable events for members of these communities. This can only have added to *Messiah*'s prestige amongst them, strengthening the sense of its greatness and its suitability for performance on future important occasions.

The same reciprocal pattern determined the association of *Messiah* with the social elite. *Messiah*'s own prestige, and the high profile of the events at which it was performed, encouraged them to attend performances, and encouraged their leading members to lend their legitimating approval as patrons. Performances offered occasions on which the social hierarchy could be displayed and legitimized. At the same time, the presence of the elite enhanced the status of the performances and of *Messiah*. When an important event was to take place in the community, at which a leading member of the social hierarchy would preside (Sir Henry Brougham Loch at the Kimberley Exhibition, or Sir Henry McCallum at Pietermaritzburg's Coronation

State Concert), there would be a general expectation that it would be enhanced by music of suitable grandeur and impeccable reputation. No music would perform that function better than *Messiah*. In exchange, *Messiah*'s own status would be enhanced by its continual deployment on such occasions.

One of the significant attributes *Messiah* afforded the settlers was its ability both to symbolize and to create the sense of a shared identity. Any public performance is a collective experience for the audience, and any performance by a group strongly associated with a given community could represent that community. But *Messiah*, in addition, lends itself to collective appropriation because the texts compiled into the libretto (with the exception of one aria, 'I know that my redeemer liveth') speak to, or on behalf of, the group. The very first words address a particular community ('Comfort ye *my people*, saith your God') and that community frequently speaks through the collective voice of the chorus: 'For unto *us* a child is born', 'Surely he hath borne *our* griefs', 'And with his stripes *we* are healed', 'But thanks be to God, who giveth *us* the victory'.

Messiah could therefore symbolize and create unity amongst those who identified with it, especially as they gathered for a particular performance. This unity could be created between different groups, or amongst the individuals belonging to one particular group. The former process was particularly important at times when a united front was needed to achieve certain goals (understood as contributing to the common good) or to resist certain threats (understood as inimical to it). As an item of British culture, it was able to draw together both the British themselves and a significant portion of the Dutch-Afrikaner population of Cape Town in the 1830s. As a Christian work, it was able to transcend the divisions between Anglicans and Methodists in Grahamstown in the 1840s, and between Catholics and Protestants in Cape Town in the following decades. The idea that *Messiah* appeals to 'all' (as emphasized, for example, in Pietermaritzburg in 1882) suggests that in the shared experience of a performance, differences could be set aside. Society could be conceived as a unity rather than as a structure of competing interests. To the extent that this larger unity masked real differences in power, this could be viewed as exemplifying a typical ideological strategy of the elite, defusing potential challenges to the status quo from those who might see themselves as standing outside the circle of its beneficiaries (J. B. Thompson, 1990: 64).

The particular attributes of a given performance situation could equally activate a different set of attributes of *Messiah*, so that it became complicit in the opposite ideological strategy, which Thompson calls 'expurgation of the other' (ibid: 65). This involves the construction of an enemy, portrayed as harmful or threatening, which individuals are called upon to resist. As Thompson argues, this strategy can often overlap with that of unification, since 'the enemy is treated as a challenge or a threat, in the face of which individuals must unite'. The construction of *Messiah*'s libretto thus made it an ideal vehicle for a particular construction of Christian orthodoxy, as seen most notably in the case of the performances that took place in Cape Town and Pietermaritzburg in 1863 and 1864 at the time of Bishop Colenso's heresy trial. In Pietermaritzburg, its promotion by a known protagonist of such orthodoxy would have drawn attention to those attributes of the libretto that were relevant to the current controversy.

Although the strategies of unification and exclusion seem opposed, they rest on the same mechanism of constructing group boundaries: depending on where these boundaries are to be drawn and by whom, attention may be directed more strongly towards those who are to be included or those who are to be excluded. *Messiah* facilitated the process of consolidating group identity by providing an opportunity for large numbers of people to come together and recognize themselves *as* a community (as in the case of Johannesburg's new elite). However, *Messiah* was not simply a neutral 'convener': it afforded people the opportunity to give specific ideological content to their shared identity. Attributes of that identity (established or desired) would resonate with similar attributes found in *Messiah*, creating the possibility for further connections to be made and a further reciprocal elaboration of the meanings and values represented by themselves and *Messiah*. *Messiah* offered them, in short, materials for world building (DeNora, 2000: 44). The attributes active in a given context cannot be specified in advance but only as they interact with one another, through the activity of socially-situated 'readers', to produce specific meanings.

What, then, were the most important meanings that emerged from the interaction of *Messiah* and South Africa's middle-class English community in the nineteenth century? I suggest that they can be summed up in the following words: Christianity, greatness, Britishness (British identity, nationalism, patriotism, imperialism), high culture, progress, social hierarchy, monarchy, power, confidence, triumph, hope and celebration. The thesis has explored the ways in which *Messiah* came to signify all of these things, so I shall not repeat the details of each one here. What I wish to propose now is that it is the whole cluster that ultimately accounts for *Messiah*'s centrality for this community.

While any one of the elements would have been sufficient to create an association between the settlers and *Messiah*, the same element could have been found in other works also, although perhaps in a somewhat less developed form. Christianity, for example, was a vital element in the settlers' identity and world-view. *Messiah* was undoubtedly a Christian work, and so it would have commended itself to them on those grounds, but so would Mozart's so-called *Twelfth Mass*, another work frequently performed during the period covered by this thesis. Excerpts from this sometimes appeared along with excerpts from *Messiah*, as in Port Elizabeth in 1860. It could articulate with the settlers' Christianity, but not with their Britishness. MacFarren's *May Day* (which appeared on the programme for the Johannesburg coronation celebrations in 1902) could certainly represent their Britishness: it was by an English composer and was described by a reviewer as 'a thoroughly English Cantata' (*MT*, 1871). It could not, however, represent their Christianity. It would have seemed an appropriate choice on this extremely important occasion, since it provided several points of contact with important aspects of the coronation, but its valency is nevertheless restricted in comparison with *Messiah*. It describes a celebration, but it is secular. It does involve a 'monarch' (the Queen of May) but this analogue is lightweight in comparison with the divine King of Kings invoked in the 'Hallelujah' Chorus. It evokes a rustic 'Merrie England', but not the all-powerful Empire. It belongs to the 'high art' tradition, but is hardly able to compete with the accumulated symbolic value of *Messiah*.

So one could continue to make comparisons with other works that have similar attributes or appeared on similar occasions, but only *Messiah* affords so many

possibilities of articulation with the identity, values, and typical concerns of the settlers. The attributes of *Messiah* and the settlers could in principle be specified separately, but their interaction produces a composite image for both in a way that provides insight not available in quite the same way from any other source. The settlers' attachment to *Messiah* tells us something about them and about *Messiah* which would not be apparent otherwise. Neither appears in exactly the same light without the other. The same could be said of *Messiah* and the African middle-class elite, but the process by which it was established amongst them was quite different.

A second story: 'Africa' into 'England'

Messiah's history amongst black South Africans began with those who were converted to Christianity through the process of mission education. For them, in contrast to the British settlers, *Messiah* was initially an unfamiliar tradition. Access to it may have been made easier by certain points of contact with indigenous musical traditions, but by the time Chris Birkett taught the 'Hallelujah' Chorus to his African singers for a performance in Grahamstown in 1863, they had already become familiar with elements of Western music as a result of their exposure to hymn singing and the tonic solfa system.

The missionary educational institutions of the Eastern Cape seem to have provided a particularly hospitable environment for *Messiah's* early growth. The importance of singing in the Methodist tradition generally, and the educational programme adopted at Healdtown in particular, resulted in the development of a choir at Healdtown which was able to present a complete programme of items from *Messiah* for the Literary Society at Lovedale Missionary Institution in 1885. Some years later, possibly as a result of Healdtown's example, Lovedale started to develop its own musical activities to a greater degree, and instituted mass singing classes for the teachers in training, at which the 'Hallelujah' Chorus was taught. Lovedale's institutional structure included a 'Normal School' and a 'Practising School', and some time before 1910 it became customary for all the students at both these schools (that is, those training to be teachers and those at the school where they did their teaching practice) to join in singing the 'Hallelujah' Chorus.

This would have given large numbers of those attending Lovedale a familiarity with Handel's music that could never have been gained simply by hearing it performed. It was thus no longer unfamiliar, but rather part of the culture of the African middle-class elite that emerged from these institutions, and later from others such as Adams College. At this point the process becomes curiously similar to that by which *Messiah* became central in South Africa's English community. As they returned to the communities from which they had come, or particularly as they travelled to the new mining centres of the north, graduates of the missionary institutions were as concerned as the British settlers to establish the culture that was familiar to them and with which they now identified: that of the missionary institutions. Because of their social prominence they were able to wield significant influence in their communities. Teachers and clergy, the most important products of the missionary institutions, were particularly well placed to promote *Messiah* through the choirs that they formed or directed in schools and churches. They inevitably passed on the music that they had learnt or heard at the missionary institutions, and *Messiah* (or at least the 'Hallelujah'

Chorus) would surely have had pride of place, not only because of its familiarity but also its status within English culture and its embodiment of the Christian message, both of which were crucial elements in African elite identity.

As the urban communities became larger and more settled, various institutions were formed which helped to promote *Messiah* through their activities. The most important of these were community choirs such as the Abantu-Batho Choral Society, which grew alongside those of the churches, schools and missionary institutions, and the various choral competitions that were established, most notably the African Eisteddfod and the Johannesburg Bantu Music Festival. These ensured that an increasing number of items from *Messiah* became familiar alongside the 'Hallelujah' Chorus. This fostered the desire and developed the skills needed to present a complete performance, the first being that of the Johannesburg African Choral Society in 1940. The 1950s saw two important developments towards the full embodiment of *Messiah* in the African community: African singers were accompanied for the first time by an orchestra (from the white community) and an annual performance tradition appeared in Soweto through the initiative of Khabi Mngoma together with the Jabavu Choristers, first conducted by Jabulani Mazibuko and then by Ben Xatasi. This was absorbed into the series of performances by the Johannesburg African Musical Society, which received wider publicity than any other performances (English or African) considered here. At the same time, Khabi Mngoma was training the Ionian Music Society, which ultimately gave more frequent performances of *Messiah* than any other choir (English or African) considered here, accompanied for the first time by an orchestra consisting of African musicians.

The aim of the missionaries had been to separate African converts as far as possible from all aspects of their indigenous culture, including its music, which the missionaries were convinced would exercise a baleful influence in drawing them away from the faith they had recently adopted. At first, many converts accepted this, and attempted to refashion themselves as far as possible on Western models. Performing *Messiah* was surely a sign of what they, and the missionaries, viewed as progress in civilization, since it was both a Christian work and represented within English culture as the greatest music ever created. Perhaps it served better than most other signs, since there seems to have been wide consensus that singing was an area in which Africans were able to excel. There would thus have been particular motivation to pursue this avenue of recognition.

However, as it became evident that no amount of progress in civilization would bring legal and political rights, the African elite sought to recover aspects of their African heritage in the process of constructing an 'inclusive' identity combining what they saw as the best elements from Africa and Europe in a new 'progressive' African culture. In this complex process, *Messiah* signified their continuing espousal of Western 'high' culture and Christianity, both of which in turn signified the possession of education. Its performance provided opportunities for them to build and maintain social networks amongst themselves, in the context of cultural institutions such as the community choirs and choral competitions. Until the 1940s it also provided opportunities for demonstrating their commitment to cooperation with those white South Africans who were sympathetic to their cause, and for distinguishing themselves from the black working class below.

The new radicalism of the later 1940s, especially as the National Party began to implement its apartheid policy, could have meant that the earlier associations of *Messiah* became a liability for its continued performance in the townships. It could have symbolized the failed attempts to achieve social, political and economic goals through demonstrating progress in civilization, or appealing to the British monarch, or accepting the leadership and advice of liberal whites. These were not, however, necessary or permanent associations: they were, indeed, 'articulations' as defined in the Introduction, and the African elite were able to find in *Messiah* attributes which enabled them to re-articulate it with their new concerns.

The Christianity which *Messiah* represented became a resource through which to pursue the struggle for justice. The figure of the Messiah, in particular, could be reclaimed as the liberator not just of the Jewish people from oppression by the Roman Empire, but of all people, including Africans facing the power of the apartheid state. The Western 'high' culture which *Messiah* represented could be claimed on behalf of a refusal to accept National Party definitions of African identity. Performances in the townships could therefore become symbolic spaces of resistance to apartheid policies, as in the case of Khabi Mngoma's performances with the People's High School and My-Africa Choral Societies. Racially mixed performances in spaces such as the Johannesburg City Hall and St Mary's Cathedral could become symbolic assertions of a non-racial ideal in opposition to the Nationalist government's attempts to separate the different 'races'. Performances by Khabi Mngoma's Ionian Music Society could demonstrate that Africans' commitment to aspects of Western culture did not forever have to remain dependent on white patronage: they had indeed made *Messiah* their own.

A list of the general meanings that emerged from the interaction of *Messiah* with the African middle-class elite would look very similar to that which I suggested for the nineteenth-century English community. Each of these, however, would be inflected (or 'accented') in specific ways by the very different contexts in which they appeared, and would therefore gather their own additional and more specific meanings. Perhaps the most surprising meaning to find duplicated in the context of the 'African' *Messiah* is 'Britishness'. It is most relevant to the earlier part of the story, when the missionaries attempted to impose British culture and the converts adopted it as their exclusive identity. In the later part of the story, it becomes a more generalized 'Westernness', signifying one aspect of a more inclusive identity. 'Greatness' plays its legitimating role here as it did for the British settlers. *Messiah*'s undisputed position at the apex of British musical culture made its performance the acid test for the abilities of African choirs, and their success initially supported their claims to equal social and political recognition, and later supported their right to participate in Western culture in a situation where the intention of government policy was to restrict each racial group to its 'own' cultural sphere, where alone its cultural aspirations could be successful.

'Christianity' is again a crucial meaning, but it changes its significance as the broader socio-political context changes. At the beginning it is closely allied to the adoption of Western culture, and (together with it) comes to signify the progress of the African converts in civilization. By the end of the story told here it signifies opposition to injustice and oppression. *Messiah* as a sign of 'high culture' (indeed, the highest culture) obviously contributed to the narrative of 'progress', but for many of the elite it also served to maintain the fragile boundary between themselves and those

immediately below them. To this extent, it became the sign of a particular social hierarchy. For most of the twentieth century, 'monarchy' was unimportant as a meaning of *Messiah*, but there was a period in the nineteenth century when loyalty to the British monarch was expressed as fervently by mission-educated Africans as by any British settler, precisely because it enabled them to construct an imaginary contrast between the high ideals represented by this exalted figure and the behaviour of actual colonial agents.

The 'power' signified by *Messiah* (through the mediation of its choruses) may indeed for the early converts have signified the power of the British monarch as symbolic head of the British empire. Singing the 'Hallelujah' Chorus gave them a vivid image of that power, inseparable in this context from the power of the God to whom the British professed allegiance. To ally themselves with this power would be to share in its benefits, which initially many of them did. Ultimately, however, that power was expressed in the form of domination and exclusion. Once again, had the meaning of *Messiah* been indissolubly wedded to this manifestation of power, it could not have served the purposes of Africans involved in the struggle for liberation. Power, however, can be enabling as well as constraining (Barker & Galasinski, 2001: 25). The power of God was claimed by those who fought against oppression. Even in the darkest days, they could celebrate, through Handel's music, the faith that strengthened them. The confidence expressed in Handel's choruses became their confidence in the justice of their cause. The promise of the Messiah could give them hope that ultimately the victory would be theirs.

Ending the stories

I chose to end my two stories at the point where *Messiah*'s establishment had been secured by the emergence of a tradition of annual performances. For the English community this took place in the 1880s and 1890s; for the African community, it took place in the 1950s and 1960s. These also turned out to be appropriate ending points in terms of the context of meaning within which *Messiah* had been constructed. On the one hand there was the waning of direct British imperial influence throughout the first decade of the twentieth century (culminating in 1910 with the self-governing Union of South Africa), and on the other there was the rise of black consciousness in the 1970s. Both of these developments inevitably had a marked effect on the climate of discourse that surrounded *Messiah*, introducing new considerations that would require extended treatment beyond the scope of this thesis. In that sense, I am staking a claim for the logic of the boundaries I have drawn, while recognizing that the story continues beyond them.

It is more difficult to draw such boundaries around meaning. As Jonathan Culler emphasizes, 'If we say that meaning is context-bound, then we must add that context is boundless' (1997: 67). Each aspect of context has its own context, and there is potentially no limit to what might conceivably be relevant. By examining *Messiah* in the context of South Africa, I have focused on the meanings that emerge from the interaction between *Messiah* as 'text' (including its accumulated associations) and a variety of groups within South African society. It is not my intention to claim that the meanings I have highlighted are the only possible ones. Indeed, I have sought to reveal the variety of meanings which have become attached to *Messiah* as it has

moved from one context to another: from metropole to colony, from Cape Town to Soweto, from nineteenth to twentieth century, from church to town hall, from the British civilizing mission to the African liberation struggle. There can be no single 'meaning' for *Messiah*, or even for the 'Hallelujah' Chorus. Its meaning is dispersed over its multiple performances.

This does not imply, however, that the meanings I have discussed are arbitrary. There is a logic to them, which is the logic of the interaction between specific attributes of *Messiah* and specific attributes of its changing contexts. A 'narrative' thread connects these different meanings, which is the process Fredric Jameson describes using the image of 'sedimentation' (1981: 9). The diachronic logic of a given meaning is its location amongst the strata of meaning laid down by successive performances and successive readings of them. The synchronic logic of a given meaning is its location between *Messiah* (heard as if for the first time), the circumstances of performance, and the broader socio-historical context.

As performers and listeners interact with *Messiah* in specific circumstances the potentially endless proliferation of meaning is temporarily stabilized. This conception is derived (via cultural studies) from Wittgenstein's theory of language, according to which meaning is regulated by practice and by social convention. For Wittgenstein, what is important is to ask 'in what special circumstances this sentence is actually used. There does it make sense' (quoted in Barker & Galasinski, 2001: 15). I have examined a range of circumstances in which *Messiah* was 'used', and my interpretations suggest how, in each set of circumstances, it 'made sense'. Wittgenstein discusses the meaning-in-use of a single word ('game') in a way which I find apt as I look back over the *Messiah* performances I have discussed:

You will not see something that is common to all, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that you find many correspondences ... but many common features drop out, and others appear And the result of this examination is: we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail.

(ibid)

Connecting stories

My story of the 'English' *Messiah* ended with British imperialism at its height, and *Messiah* in support of a power which dominated not only South Africa but much of the globe. Active in this context was a universal vision of *Messiah* as the best of all music, which therefore deserved to be established everywhere. This vision sought to universalize one culture, which is to say one version of being human. My story of the 'African' *Messiah* ended with apartheid at its height, but with *Messiah* supporting the struggle of an oppressed people against the power dominating their world. A universal vision was active in this context too, but it assumed that all people, regardless of race, should have free and equal access to *Messiah*, and that *Messiah* was able to speak to them because of a shared humanity into which it could help to integrate them. I should like to keep these two visions in mind as I write this final section.

The whole history recounted here highlights the potential of symbolic forms both to support and to challenge a dominant social order. These are the two basic ideological functions of legitimation and subversion (C. Myers, 1988: 18). In the context of the 1902 coronation, *Messiah* was mobilized on behalf of the institution of monarchy and the entire socio-political order associated with it. In the context of the 1952 performance by the People's High School Choral Society, *Messiah* was mobilized on behalf of those who had rebelled against the Bantu Education Act and the entire socio-political order associated with it. Not all cases were so clear-cut, of course. In the case of the JAMS performances that began in 1959, I discussed the variety of ways in which it could be viewed, although I ultimately regarded it as subversive in relation to National Party ideology because it staged inter-racial mixing and African participation in high Western culture. A given performance could be subversive of one aspect of a dominant order (political, for example) while legitimating another (economic, for example). In this regard, many performances by the African elite could be seen as challenging their racial oppression while maintaining their class privilege.

Subversive appropriations of *Messiah* have certainly been in the minority. *Messiah* came from England already affiliated to hegemonic ideology, and this was precisely what commended it both to the British settlers and the early African converts to Christianity. It was only as the emerging black elite experienced continued marginalization that they began to question aspects of this ideology. The fact that they did not reject *Messiah* positions them as 'reformists' rather than 'revolutionaries', in the terms adopted by the theologian Ched Myers. Rather than repudiating the dominant symbolic system altogether, reformists characteristically try to 'give new meaning to established symbols' (ibid: 18-19). Myers views Christianity itself as an initially subversive ideology which became hegemonic after Constantine established it as the official religion of the Roman Empire. It nevertheless preserved what liberation theologians have called a 'subversive memory' (ibid: 19), and I suggest that black South Africans were able to re-activate those elements of subversive memory preserved in the libretto of *Messiah*.

These examples demonstrate that *Messiah* cannot be regarded as inherently legitimating or subversive. Rather, it consists of a mixture of attributes that have the potential to be taken up in different ways. One of my tasks in this thesis has been to interpret the ways in which it has been taken up in different socio-historical contexts. In doing so I have necessarily ventured outside my own socio-historical context, with the inevitable risks that this entails. I have aimed to remain alert to the danger of assuming too quickly and easily that one understands an 'other' whose experience is very different from one's own. In South Africa, there is an understandable sensitivity about doing this across racial divisions. Nevertheless, there seems to me an equal danger in assuming that differences cannot be bridged. South African discourse has had, and still has, a particular tendency to absolutize differences of 'race'. The American historian Lawrence Levine has written about the problem of the 'culture gap' that surfaced with particular force in the United States in the 1960s, when it began to be suggested that those whose origins and background made them 'outsiders' to a particular past would find it impossible to write its history. At different moments in his career, he had to face assertions that foreigners (even foreign immigrants) would not be able to write the history of America, and that white people would not be able to write the history of black people. Levine states that 'I found it impossible to accept casually these caveats about who could and could not write certain types of

history, and I responded by arguing that “there are no impassable cultural gaps in the realm of historical scholarship” (2005: 3). He reminds us that historians always have to face the gap created by the passing of time, the ‘discontinuity between their own cultural conditioning and expectations and those of their subjects’ (ibid: 4). He asserts that while that gap might never be completely bridged, it can be closed sufficiently for historians to ‘listen to the voices of their subjects with imagination and empathy and to recreate their lives with accuracy and sensitivity’ (ibid).

This returns me to Gary Tomlinson’s discussion of the relationship between ethnography and history, or ethnomusicology and musicology, all of which he suggests could be ‘united in their effort to converse with other cultures and other times’ (1984: 362), and to the discussion of my own socio-historical location. In many ways this thesis has been an attempt to understand the limits of commonality and difference. I have told separate stories of *Messiah* because South Africa’s socio-political history determined that people to a large extent lived in separate worlds, but one of the connections between these worlds is the importance they each give to a symbolic form which they share: Handel’s *Messiah*. There are commonalities between the meaning and value it has had for each group, but also differences. If it comes to mean something different, there is a sense in which it is not ‘the same work’. It is therefore shared and not shared, a point of contact or a moment of recognition from which a conversation might begin. It is not yet a sign of a single identity.

What is my own connection to each of these stories? In interpreting them, I am clearly conversing with other times (though the ‘African’ story just overlaps with my own lifetime), but am I conversing with other cultures? The word ‘other’ implies ‘not my own’. This research has served to complicate the drawing of the boundaries needed to make these distinctions. Does the ‘English’ story belong to ‘my’ culture, and the ‘African’ story to another culture, simply because I am (primarily) of English descent? They are both stories of *Messiah*, and they are both South African stories. Is it not possible that I can connect to each of them in a multiplicity of ways, not only in terms of my membership of a certain ethnic group? In assessing them, must it be assumed that my sympathies will automatically lie with my ‘own’ group? As it happens, of the two visions with which I started this section, I identify more strongly with the one that emerges from the history of the ‘other’ group. Why think of it as ‘other’, then?

I identify with the second vision because of the values of inclusivity and equality it embodies, and which are absent from the ‘imperial’ vision of domination. Khabi Mngoma’s insistence on his own right of access to African and Western music recalls the aim of the African elite in the 1930s to combine what they saw as the best elements of African and European culture (see above: 169). I would like to take from this not the assumption that it might be possible or desirable to create in this way a new (let alone a universal) culture, but rather the willingness to examine each culture critically, to judge what might be good or bad about its past traditions, according to certain criteria, active for the present. It seems to me that this critical perspective remains essential not only in the academic context in which I am writing (where indeed it is difficult to see how it could responsibly be abandoned) but also in social life more generally. It is only as all people come to recognize in this way the mixed bag that constitutes their own cultural traditions and histories that the possibility opens for choosing a broader human vision for the future. In the last comments by

Mngoma which I quoted (see above: 235), I hear him suggesting that while we always become human through a particular culture, it need not determine absolutely the boundaries of our world: there are other stories that, we may discover, are also part of our story.

This, as Tomlinson suggests at the conclusion of his essay, is our 'reward', but only at the end. It is after having attempted to question the 'meanings that come to us all too automatically', having tried 'to conceive of other meanings, other assumptions, other aspirations and fears' that we may come to a fuller knowledge not only of 'the works we value', but also of 'the humanity we embody' (1984: 362). In view of the many well-founded attacks on 'essentialism' it is perhaps worth emphasizing that this does not presuppose the existence of particular features which constitute an 'essence' of the human. It does require, as Fredric Jameson argues, some way of seeing 'the human adventure as one' (1981: 19): in other words, the distant 'other' only 'speaks' to us if there is some sense in which we stand within the same story.

One way of reading my South African history of *Messiah*, which highlights what the two stories have in common, might indeed be as a double refusal to be categorized as 'other': the colony as the other of the metropole, 'Africa' as the other of 'civilization'. Despite their many differences, both stories embody a bid for acceptance or recognition. The British settlers sought to gain recognition as belonging to the culture of the metropole. At different times they wished to have the status of self-rule, or to be incorporated as part of the Empire. If they could not immediately prove themselves the equals of those in the metropole, they could situate themselves in a narrative of progress in which such equality could be understood as the inevitable conclusion. So too could the early African mission-educated elite, who sought to gain recognition as 'civilized' Christians. For both groups, *Messiah*, itself a story of redemption, could prove a valuable ally in redeeming a situation of displacement – from the familiar landscape of England on the one hand, from familiar African traditions on the other.

It was a socio-historical context characterized by inequality (between metropole and colony, white and black) that made such a bid necessary, and also ensured that it was a profoundly contradictory enterprise. A given performance of *Messiah* aspired to connect its performers and audience – its interpretive community – to one conceived as having greater prestige or legitimacy. By aiming to succeed on terms established by those who created the hierarchical order and in whose interests it functioned, the colonists and the early African elite granted it legitimacy and ultimately perpetuated their own exclusion. Their aim was to ascend to a higher rung of the ladder, and in this they certainly did succeed. This history has consistently associated *Messiah* with elites of various kinds, and it helped them to secure and to celebrate their position. However, there were always rungs of the musical and social ladders to which access remained firmly closed, as long as power and resources were ultimately concentrated 'elsewhere', as they were throughout the periods discussed here. Certainly the later African elite (from the 1930s through to 1970) became progressively less concerned to win approval on terms set by the white community, but groups like the Johannesburg African Music Society and the Ionians still had something to prove: their right to participate in Western culture as part of a self-definition that refused incorporation into apartheid's categories. Such efforts undoubtedly achieved considerable success, but as long as resources remained unequally distributed, limitations would become apparent at some point.

Within a competitive system, ascent to a higher level can only be at the expense of someone else. The victory celebrated by the 'Hallelujah' Chorus cannot be unequivocally welcomed unless it symbolizes a victory that is in some sense 'universal', 'for all'. For Marxists this might be the creation of a classless society; for Christians it might be the arrival of the kingdom of God. The Utopian moment of recent South African history was indeed the vision of a society that had room for all, rather than one in which new groups gained the opportunity to dominate. This inclusive vision is now under severe strain at several points. Whether *Messiah* will be able to support it, and whether it will support *Messiah* in the South African future, depends on the extent to which people will be able to find 'enabling similarities' between the attributes of that vision and the attributes of *Messiah* – but that is a story that will have to be told at another time.

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Interviews

In each case I have given a brief indication of the role(s) through which the interviewee had developed a particular connection with *Messiah* that prompted me to interview them: it is not intended to be a general description of each person or to cover all aspects of their involvement in the musical world.

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