

## **Hndel's Messiah**

Georg Friederich Hndel was born in Germany in 1685. The Royal Houses of Britain and Europe had always been closely interrelated, and the Act of Settlement of 1701 secured the Protestant succession of Anne to the Crown. Hndel, who had studied and performed in Europe, left Italy early in 1710 for Hanover, where he was appointed Kapellmeister to the Elector, George Louis. In August 1714, at the death of Queen Anne, George became George I, king of Britain. Hndel followed George and adopted British nationality. By invitation of the Duke of Devonshire, who was anxious to further music in Dublin, Hndel moved to Ireland. In 1742, he gave the first performance of the Messiah in the Music Hall, Fishamble Street, Dublin in aid of several charities. By 1170, the famous Messiah was performed in Colonial America, 2 years before its first performance in his native Germany.

Hndel died in 1759 and was buried in Westminster Abbey, recognized in England as the greatest composer of his day. His Messiah was as popular then as Bing Crosby's White Christmas is today.

## **Silent Night, Holy Night**

Perhaps the best known Christmas carol is Silent Night, written in 1818 by an Austrian assistant priest Joseph Mohr. He was told the day before Christmas that the church organ was broken and would not be repaired in time for Christmas Day. Saddened, he sat down to write three stanzas that could be sung by choir to guitar music. "Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht" was heard for the first time at that Midnight Mass in St. Nicholas Church in Oberndorf, Austria. The congregation listened as the voices of the Fr. Joseph Mohr and the choir director, Franz Xaver Gruber, rang through the church to the accompaniment of Fr. Mohr's guitar. Today, Silent Night, Holy Night is sung in more than 180 languages by millions of people.

The popularity of Christmas was further spurred on in 1820 by Washington Irving's book The Keeping of Christmas at Bracebridge Hall. In 1834, Britain's Queen Victoria brought her German husband, Prince Albert, into Windsor Castle, reintroducing the Christmas tree and carols to the British Empire. In 1837, T.H. Hervey's The Book of Christmas became a best seller. Printed books were more popular then ever. The