# Museum to showcase queer reinterpretation of Handel’s Messiah



The Foundling Museum in Camden, London, is set to host a unique reinterpretation of Handel’s classic, Messiah, during the upcoming festive season. Scheduled for 6th December, the performance, entitled A Queer Georgian Yuletide: Handel’s Queer Messiah, aims to offer a modern retelling of the traditional oratorio that resonates with contemporary audiences, particularly within the LGBTQ+ community.

The event is facilitated by the ensemble Les Bougiewill, renowned for their vocal and period-instrument performances. Their version seeks to explore the notion of a "messiah" from multiple queer perspectives, incorporating secular, sacred, interpersonal, and intrapersonal interpretations. The ensemble has highlighted that individual interpretations of a "queer Georgian 'messiah'" may vary, reflecting the diverse experiences and identities within the queer community.

In this version, while Handel's music will remain unchanged, the original text will be adapted. Traditionally, the libretto of Messiah was compiled by Charles Jennens, using extracts from the King James Bible and the Book of Common Prayer. It narrates the prophetic birth, passion, resurrection, and eventual redemption offered by Jesus Christ. The ensemble intends to modify the text to evolve the narrative into a more universal and inclusive story that aligns with the experiences and identities of a 21st-century audience.

Despite its creative ambition, this reinterpretation has met with dissonance from certain religious groups and individuals. The Christian Emergency Alliance has questioned the necessity and acceptability of what they perceive as a blasphemous reinterpretation of a sacred work. Dr Gavin Ashenden, a Catholic theologian and former chaplain to Queen Elizabeth II, has also voiced strong criticism, seeing this adaptation as undermining the traditional religious themes and values represented in the original "Messiah."

The Foundling Museum maintains that the intent is not to offend or insult any religious or non-religious individuals. They emphasise that adaptations of Handel’s Messiah for different audiences align with the historical fluidity of the document as conceived by Handel. The museum argues that the pastiche is designed to reposition the Messiah's story to better connect with contemporary queer audiences, suggesting that Handel’s work can evolve with cultural shifts while retaining its artistic integrity.

**Friday 6th December, foundlingmuseum.org.uk**

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://foundlingmuseum.org.uk/event/queer-georgian-yuletide/> - Corroborates the details of the 'A Queer Georgian Yuletide: Handel’s Queer Messiah' event, including its unique reinterpretation and the involvement of the Foundling Museum.
* <https://foundlingmuseum.org.uk/event/queer-georgian-yuletide/> - Provides information on the ensemble Les Bougiewill and their approach to adapting the libretto for a queer perspective.
* <http://foundlingmuseum.org.uk/handel-gallery/> - Supports the historical context of Handel’s 'Messiah' and its connection to the Foundling Museum, including the original manuscripts and performances.
* <http://foundlingmuseum.org.uk/handel-gallery/> - Details the significance of Charles Jennens in compiling the libretto of 'Messiah' using biblical and prayer book extracts.
* <https://foundlingmuseum.org.uk/event/handel-the-philanthropist/> - Highlights Handel’s philanthropic activities, including his benefit performances of 'Messiah' for the Foundling Hospital, which aligns with the museum’s stance on adaptations.
* <https://foundlingmuseum.org.uk/event/handel-the-philanthropist/> - Provides historical context on how 'Messiah' was initially received and how it became a staple in charity performances, supporting the idea of its adaptability.
* <https://thesixteen.com/event/handels-messiah-london-3/> - Corroborates the historical reception of 'Messiah' in London and its later acceptance through charity performances at the Foundling Hospital.
* <https://thesixteen.com/event/handels-messiah-london-3/> - Supports the ongoing tradition of performing 'Messiah' in London, highlighting its cultural significance and adaptability.
* <https://www.london-handel-festival.com/show/2024-messiah/> - Provides an example of another contemporary performance of 'Messiah' in London, showing the continued relevance and adaptability of the work.