PROGRAM NOTES by Steven Lowe

GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL
Coronation Anthem II, “Let thy hand be strengthened”, HWV 259
BORN: February 23, 1685, in Halle, Saxony, Germany
DIED: April 14, 1759, in London
WORK COMPOSED: 1727
WORLD PREMIERE: October 11, 1727, at Westminster Abbey

King George I died on June 11, 1727; four days later he was succeeded by George II. Handel had recently been naturalized as a British citizen by the deceased monarch, and he provided the music for the anthem “Let thy hand be strengthened.”

After a throat-clearing note from the organ the orchestra lays out a buoyant and festive introduction for the ensuing choral contribution. Enriched by trumpets and drums the brave instrumental sound adds great luster and pomp to the occasions.

The middle verse, cast in the minor, offers a somber counterpoise to the major-key celebratory mien of the opening sentence. Rich harmonic suspensions recall Handel’s older colleague Arcangelo Corelli, whom the German-born composer knew from his student years in Italy.

An energetic and rousing final Alleluia! chorus ends the work in a joyous and uplifting fashion, with ascending vocal lines seeming to aspire to heaven.

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