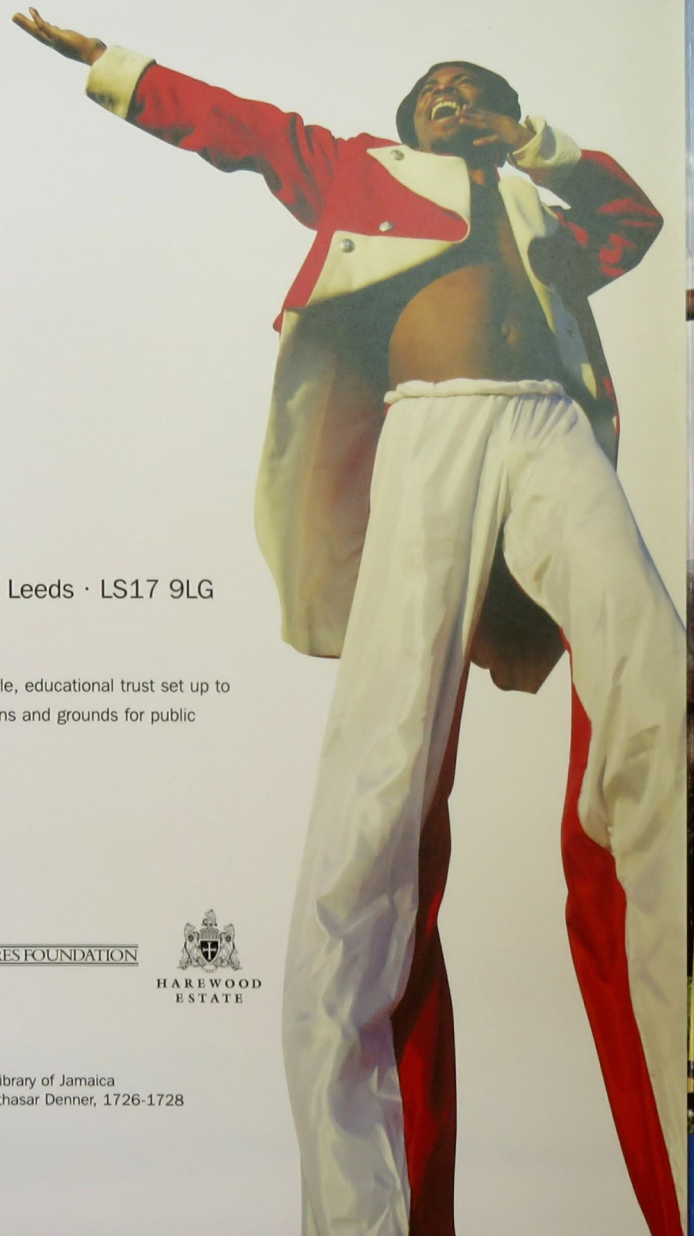

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Carnival Messiah
at Harewood

Two Cherished Traditions: **One Shared Heritage**

Handel's **Messiah** on a **Carnival** stage

What is Carnival Messiah?

Carnival Messiah is a radical re-invention of Handel's oratorio 'Messiah' as a spectacular piece of musical and carnival theatre. It draws upon the heritages of two cherished but very diverse cultural traditions: European classical music and Caribbean carnival. It takes some of Handel's most inspiring classical melodies and sits them alongside a host of other musical styles including gospel, calypso, reggae, jazz, hip hop, bhangra and the steel band.

A huge cast of dancers, singers, masqueraders, musicians and actors unite the excitement, music and colour of carnival with towering costumes and glittering mobiles. Stories from the Caribbean folk tradition, medieval mystery plays, commedia dell'arte and African ritual combine with contemporary popular music and dance styles, to tell the universal story of birth, death and rebirth.

Carnival Messiah is a unique collaboration between myself, a second generation Caribbean migrant to Britain and direct descendent of an enslaved African, working closely together with David Lascelles, a descendent of an English banker and businessman who made his family fortune through the African slave trade.

Carnival Messiah at Harewood exemplifies notions of re-construction, integration, healing, sharing and unification in a bid to create a transformation that can take us all to a new space, a new place, a new dimension, a new understanding and gives us all new hope for the future.

Geraldine Connor,
Creator & Artistic Director

Where did Carnival come from?

CARNIVAL

It is estimated that before 1807, over 20 million people were forcibly taken from the West coast of Africa and forced to work on the plantations of the Americas - the Caribbean, Brazil, and the southern states of North America - producing luxury goods such as sugar, tobacco, rum and cotton for the European market.

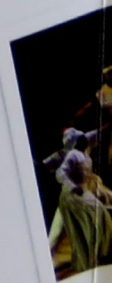
In Trinidad, the early morning celebration of the first day of carnival is called "Jouvay". The term is a corruption of the French expression "Jour ouvert" (opening of the day) and is derived from the enactment of 'Cannes Bruleés' (burning of the sugar cane).

This was the only time of the year that enslaved Africans from different plantations were able to legitimately gather together. It was a time of celebration for them and many marriages, child namings and thanksgivings were known to take place under its guise.

After emancipation in Trinidad in 1834, (27 years after the abolition of the slave trade) they celebrated their newly acquired freedom by re-enacting Cannes Bruleés on the streets of Port-of-Spain. Under its new guise of Jouvay or carnival, these celebrations provided the blueprint for the carnival masquerade bands of today.

Carnival is not just a legalised rave... lest we forget, millions lost their lives in pursuit of their liberty. Today, carnival best expresses the strategies that the people of the Caribbean and black British citizens have for speaking about themselves and their relationship with the world, with history, with tradition, with nature and with God. Carnival is the embodiment of their sense of being and purpose. Its celebration is the essential and profoundly self-affirming gesture of a people.

Watercolour of an early 19th century Jamaican carnival figure by Isaac Mendes Belisario

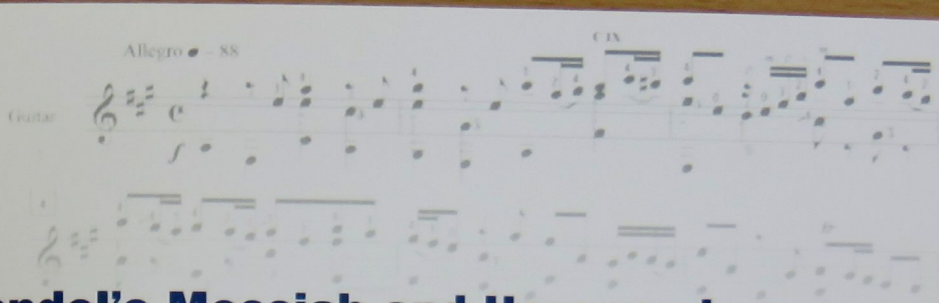


THE STEEL BAND

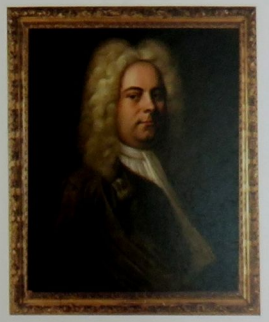
There were riots during Cannes Bruleés in 1884 and the playing of the African drum, conch shells and horns in public was banned. To get round this legislation different strategies were adopted; tambour bamboo bands were formed by playing on tuned lengths of bamboo of different sizes. Rhythms were beaten out on pieces of scrap metal, tins, boxes, graters and bottles.

By the 1920's different sizes and designs of zinc and pitch oil tins, as well as kerosene, biscuit and caustic soda drums were beginning to be substituted for equivalent tambour bamboo instruments. By the 1930's the first steel pans began to appear, with names like "dudup" and "ping pong", taking their names from the timbre of sound they produced and the manner in which they were played.

With the arrival in Trinidad of an American Military Base at the beginning of WWII and the importation of oil in large metal drums, came what we recognise today as the steel pan. The folk musicians of Trinidad were resourceful enough to bring out from their cultural past a unique alternative musical system, a percussion orchestra known as the steel band. They were cheaper to produce, free from the legal strictures accorded to the African drum and, interestingly, the only new instrument to be invented in the 20th century.



Handel's Messiah and Harewood



George Frideric Handel (1685-1759) was born in Germany but composed most of his best known music in Britain. In 1727 Handel was commissioned to write four anthems for the coronation ceremony of King George II. The most well known of these, Zadok the Priest, has been performed at every coronation since. Handel wrote Messiah in just three weeks during 1741 as a series of musical movements based upon texts from the bible. The 'oratorio' (an unstaged musical performance) traces the birth, death and resurrection of Christ concluding with his role as Saviour. These themes as well as Handel's inspiring melodies translate into Carnival Messiah.

Edward Lascelles, 1st Earl of Harewood (1740-1820) was passionate about music and seems to have particularly enjoyed the music of Handel. Edward employed John White to be music master at Harewood, to act as tutor as well as composer and conductor. White was the assistant conductor of a massed choir performance of Handel's Messiah at York Minster in 1823. In 1816 a concert was performed in the Gallery at Harewood in honour of Grand Duke Nicholas of Russia which consisted mainly of Handel's arias and choruses. Edward's own annotated music books indicate that the arias from Messiah were performed regularly at Harewood in the early 19th century.

'Handel was able to assimilate what he wanted from whatever tradition he met, without awkwardness or incongruity and to comprehend the new without abandoning the old.'

The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians

Why Carnival Messiah at Harewood?

Harewood House was built with the fortune made by Henry Lascelles and his brother Edward (right) through the sugar trade in the early 18th century. In the year of the bi-centenary of the abolition of the slave trade, Harewood House Trust (the educational, charitable trust that has run Harewood since 1986) is proud to be the venue for such a spectacular expression of contemporary Caribbean culture as "Carnival Messiah".

Britain today is a multi-cultural society. That's not a matter for debate in my opinion: It's a fact. Carnival Messiah is its living embodiment and there is I think, a wholly appropriate sense of full circle, of reconciliation, about it being performed here at Harewood at such a significant time.

David Lascelles,
Executive Producer

"...an immaculate conception"
***** The Guardian

"...you are carried away by the whole experience"
Yorkshire Post