

The Life Of George Frideric Handel



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Early Years in Germany

George Frideric Handel was born on February 23, 1685, in Halle, a city in the duchy of Magdeburg, within the Holy Roman Empire, which is now part of modern-day Germany. The youngest child of Georg Händel and Dorothea Taust, George Frideric's upbringing was characterized by a strong blend of discipline and cultural exposure. His father, a distinguished barber-surgeon at the court of the Duke of Saxe-Weissenfels, initially opposed Handel's musical aspirations, hoping for his son to pursue a more stable profession, such as law. Nonetheless, young Handel's early fascination with music was undeniable and so strong that he began to pursue it secretly, often playing a clavichord that had been smuggled into the attic of his home.

Handel's natural talent was apparent from an incredibly young age. By the age of seven, he was already an experienced performer on the harpsichord and organ. The turning point in his musical journey came when he went to visit the court at Weissenfels, where the Duke, impressed by young Handel's skillful playing, persuaded his father to allow the boy to have formal music lessons. This endorsement proved to be a pivotal moment in Handel's life and marked the beginning of a remarkable musical journey.

Following the Duke's advice, Handel began his formal education in music under the tutelage of Friedrich Wilhelm Zachow, the organist of the Lutheran Marienkirche in Halle. Zachow was a competent composer and organist who provided Handel with an extensive education that covered various aspects of music theory and practice, including composition, counterpoint, and performance. Under Zachow's mentorship, Handel not only honed his skills on the organ and harpsichord but also learned to play the violin and the oboe.

In this period, young Handel was exposed to a wide range of musical styles and forms, from the complex polyphony of German composers to the expressive melodies of Italian music, and the grandiose orchestral works of French composers. This rich and diverse exposure played an instrumental role in shaping Handel's eclectic and versatile compositional style.

Observing how different musical traditions could be woven together to create something unique, Handel started to develop his distinctive voice. Throughout his time in Halle and under Zachow's guidance, Handel composed a variety of early works, ranging from keyboard sonatas to church cantatas. These pieces were early indicators of his profound musical genius and versatility.

However, the musical career that seemed to be blossoming in his hometown was about to advance significantly. At the age of seventeen, Handel enrolled at the University of Halle to study law, as initially desired by his father. But, with his father's passing shortly before he began his studies, Handel found himself at a crossroads. Freed from the paternal pressure to pursue a legal career, he was able to fully immerse himself in his true passion—music. During his brief tenure at the university, Handel continued to thrive musically, securing a position as the organist of the Cathedral of Halle in 1702. This role not only marked his first professional appointment but also positioned him within the vibrant German musical scene of the early 18th century.

By the time Handel left Halle in 1703 to explore new and exciting musical opportunities, he had already laid the foundations for a career that would eventually lead him to become one of the most celebrated composers of the Baroque era. The skills, knowledge, and experiences he gathered during his early years in Germany indelibly shaped his music and steered him towards a path of greatness. These formative years were just the beginning of an extraordinary journey that would take Handel across Europe, impacting the course of classical music history profoundly.

