

The First Performances of G. F. Händel's *Messiah* in Japan: The Facts and Their Background

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This paper aims to clarify the first performances and their background of G. F. Händel's oratorio *Messiah* in Japan. Although the Halleluiah chorus was sporadically sung from the Meiji era, *Messiah*'s through performance with its three parts started in the 1920's under the baton of Fred Daniel Gealy (1894–1976) in Tokyo and NAGAI Hitoshi (1893–1985) in Osaka. There are still doubts as to which performance was the premiere in Japan.

Based on the remaining program sheets and newspaper articles, the actual situation of its earliest through performances (dates, venues, performers and sung pieces) has been clarified, namely of December 20th, 1925 by Gealy in Tokyo, and of March 27th, 1927 by NAGAI in Osaka and April 16th, 1927 again by Gealy in Tokyo. From the chorus members of the Tokyo revival, a collaboration of Christian missionaries of various sects and nationalities has emerged.

The importance of the Eighth World Sunday School Convention held in Tokyo in October 1920 must be emphasized as the background to the fact that *Messiah*, requiring a strong chorus, was performed one after another in the mid-1920s. In this convention, held four years later due to World War I, a choir of nearly one thousand sang three choruses from *Messiah*, conducted by Augustine Smith (1875–1952). (TSUGAWA Shuichi wrote that this "caused zeal for choral singing in Japanese Christian churches" and that he "decided to devote [his] life to holy music," as did TORII Chūgorō and others too.) On October 29th, the Osaka choir of 250 sang the Hallelujah chorus in Osaka conducted by NAGAI.

Missionaries' performances of Oratorios and their choruses, totally overlooked hitherto, should be re-evaluated as activities that contributed to the collective interest on the part of the recipient in the history of *Messiah* reception in Japan.