



What's Inside?

- Upcoming Music Events: New Music Sunday and Songstresses: Art Songs by Women Composers, page 2.
- Govans Community Farm Grand Opening, page 3
- George Frideric Handel and the Royal African Company, pages 4-6
- New Tax Benefit for 2026 Contributors to Govans, page 7

GOVANS COMMUNITY FARM GRAND OPENING - APRIL 19

by Jon Morgan

Live music, face-painting, creating bug hotels and seed bombs and a plant give-away are among the festivities planned for the grand opening of the Govans Community Farm at noon on **Sunday, April 19.**

The event will be moved indoors in the event of inclement weather. Tables will be set up for groups such as the Farm Alliance, a collective of urban farms, to distribute information. Food will also be available. Live music will include the Patapsco Delta Boys and our own Annie Owens. Nature Sacred, an important farm sponsor, will host a journaling activity. Conceived as part of the church's commitment to racial reconciliation, the farm will provide



Welcome to the Govans Community Farm!

fresh vegetables and – eventually – work opportunities for the surrounding community. Seeds have already been planted for a spring crop in four raised beds now on the church's front yard in addition to our two other vegetable plots.

...continued on page 5

EASTER SUNDAY AT GOVANS

Sunday, April 5

Join us for worship at 10:30 a.m. and a visit from the Easter Bunny and Egg Hunt to follow!

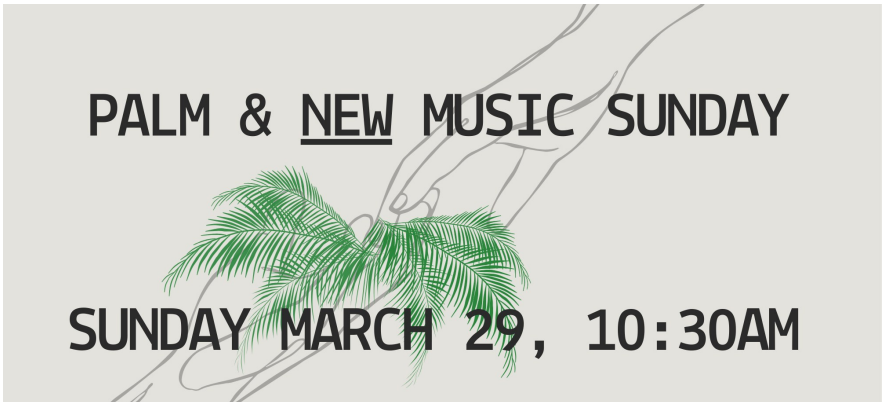


NEW MUSIC SUNDAY COMING - PALM SUNDAY, MARCH 29

Join us during worship on Palm Sunday, March 29 for New Music Sunday, featuring the premieres of works by two local DMV composers, Justine Koontz and Patrick

Flannery, along with music by nationally known composer Noah

Michael Smith and internationally recognized composer Ola Gjeilo. The music will be offered by the Govans Chancel Choir under the direction of Marie Herrington.



PALM & NEW MUSIC SUNDAY

SUNDAY MARCH 29, 10:30AM

PRESENTED BY:

Songstresses:
ART SONGS BY
WOMEN COMPOSERS

Sunday, April 12
3:00pm
Govans Presbyterian Church

Sofia Scattarreggia,
soprano

Kellen Johnson,
baritone

Marie Herrington,
pianist

SONGSTRESSES: ART SONGS BY WOMEN COMPOSERS

Join us in the sanctuary on April 12 at 3:00 p.m. for **Songstresses: Art Songs by Women Composers** presents a musical tapestry woven from the voices of underrepresented composers in the art song tradition. This recital highlights works by influential women whose compositions have too often been overlooked in the performance world. The diverse program features music by French, German, and American composers spanning nearly 200 years.

The recital was conceived to celebrate the creativity and impact of extraordinary women, with special attention to composers connected to the Baltimore community. The program will include compositions — and a performance — by nationally acclaimed Baltimore-based composer **Marie Herrington**. Other featured composers include **Clara Schumann, Lili Boulanger, Pauline Viardot, Margaret Bonds, and Florence Price**, among others.

Admission is free, with donations accepted. Half of the proceeds from the recital will benefit **The Marian House**, a Baltimore-area community supporting women and their children through housing and rehabilitation services. The event will also include a goods drive, and attendees are invited to bring in-kind donations for The Marian House.

The program will be performed by classical soprano **Sofia Scattarreggia**, Baltimore-based baritone **Kellen Johnson**, and soprano and composer **Marie Herrington**.

The Marian House Wishlist can be found at the adjacent QR Code:



Scan for *Marian House Wishlist*

GOVANS COMMUNITY FARM GRAND OPENING

(CONTINUED FROM COVER PAGE)

But that's only the beginning, says Peter Conrad, a leader in the effort.

"This is the start of a much larger process," he says, "It's truly a community effort as so many organizations have provided support and resources."

Eventually the planning committee hopes to connect the farm with other assets on and off church property to expand the harvest, and opportunities. A \$160,000 state grant has been approved for the construction of a 20 foot by 40-foot open pavilion that could house yoga classes, family reunions, cooking demonstrations and other events as early as this fall.



Raised beds at the future farm site, a glimpse of what's to come.

Combined with other gardens already on church property, and the new food-distribution refrigerator and area pantries, the farm could be the core of a greatly expanded effort to combat food insecurity. Eventually other nearby property could be tilled and vertical growing towers used.

"If we're able to bring on staff and integrate this with other locations we'll really be rolling," Conrad says. "It's not a church farm, it's a something we want the community to be engaged in."

Nature Sacred, an Annapolis-based foundation dedicated to expanding urban green spaces, helped with the design. Other partners are GEDCO, Loyola University, the York Road Business Improvement



District and the York Road partnership.

The first crop will feature kale, cabbage, Brussel sprouts and early spinach. Organic methods will be the standard. A pollinator garden of native plants to attract bees and other pollinating insects has been funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. A cistern will be used to collect rainwater. Still under discussion: fencing to keep out hungry wildlife.

The harvest will be distributed through the Cares Food Pantry and other outlets, including the food ministry refrigerator on the church campus.



Our partner organization, Nature Sacred reinstalled this bench in the farm area. This is the 2nd Nature Sacred bench on church property.

GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL AND THE ROYAL AFRICAN COMPANY

by Myra Brosius, member, Racial Justice Ministry Committee

It appears that George Frideric Handel has some explaining to do. A recent discovery revealed that the composer held shares of stock in the Royal African Company, a British slave-trading enterprise. How is it that Handel, the musical genius of the Baroque era, came to garner wealth at the expense of the humanity of enslaved Africans?

I discovered Handel's entanglement with the slave trade in the just-past season of Advent as I prepared to play a flute sonata at a Sunday service. Handel wrote the sonata in 1712 at the age of 27. The German composer had moved to London two years prior where he established what would become a long and illustrious career. Thirty years later, he composed his sublime *Messiah*.



*Handel 1733 by Balthasar Denner
German Historical Museum, Berlin.
Public Domain*

I was surprised to learn that the relative worth of his earnings would make Handel, today, a millionaire several times over. What was disappointing and disorienting, however, was that some of his earnings were linked to the Royal African Company (RAC). No other organization shipped more enslaved Africans to the Americas. The profits of the industry played a significant part in Britain's becoming an economic powerhouse.

In 2013 Dr. David Hunter discovered some startling documents—a few orders signed by Handel, dated around 1720, to buy and sell shares of RAC stock.¹ The news traveled fast among musicologists as they engaged in conversations about the 18th century norms of financial practices in London, to place the findings in a historical context. Some believe that Hunter exaggerated the significance of Handel's involvement with the slave trade. The conversation interested me as I thought of

discussions about our own legacy of slavery that are sometimes framed in a kind of relative complicity.

People frame slavery and how it relates to the present day in a variety of ways and the framing seems to influence our perspectives on systemic racism. If I have benefited from the privilege of my white ancestors, while others were held back by the prejudice against their Black ancestors, and I do nothing to repair those harms, am I less complicit in racial oppression than the 19th century enslaver? If shares of RAC stocks were transferred to Handel as a method of payment from his benefactors, is he less complicit than those same aristocrats who purchased shares of the stocks for profit? Is it useful to employ a sliding scale of relative complicity or are these measures a distinction without a difference?

The Royal African Company and Academy of Music

Britain's government encouraged the transatlantic slave trade by providing royal charters. The Royal African Company (RAC) was the largest such charter operating for over a century from 1663 to 1807. Britain was transformed by the wealth garnered by the RAC, particularly in and around London.

With funds from the RAC, King George I established The Royal Academy of Music in 1719 to provide Italian opera for the aristocracy. Handel was hired as Master of the Orchestra for the Academy; he served there for a decade until its folding. It is during this period when Handel signed the orders to buy and sell stock of the RAC.



Coat of Arms of the Royal African Company, Wikimedia Commons

How and why did Handel own an array of accounts with the RAC? Apparently, it was common practice for the aristocracy to make

...continued on next page

GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL AND THE ROYAL AFRICAN COMPANY

...continued from previous page

payments through the transfer of stock. It is thought that these accounts were convenient means of paying Handel for services. Many of the investors in the Academy were stockholders of the RAC.

Dr. Ellen Harris makes a distinction between Handel receiving payment as compared to purchasing stock:

“All of Handel’s accounts from 1720 to 1732.... probably represent a repository for pensions, fees, or salary; therefore, the formulation that ‘Handel bought’ or ‘Handel purchased’ such ... during these years is probably incorrect in all cases, and, at the very least, should only be used with caution. None of these accounts suggests an investment [by Handel in the Slave Trade].”²

Is this an important distinction?

In published works and internet message boards, Drs. Hunter and Harris and others have engaged in debate about how exactly Handel acquired his stocks while he was employed by the Academy and the few years thereafter (1720-1732). One side of the argument seems to apply the concept of relative complicity—that “investing in the slave trade” was different by degree than receiving payment through “a repository for fees or salary”.

With a similar perspective, the National Philharmonic recently produced a short film. On the one hand the video acknowledges that “oratorio’s required significant wealth and...a lot of that wealth came from the slave trade,” while on the other hand they provide a kind of dispensation to Handel by explaining that receiving payment by his patrons “transferring shares of stock was something like your company contributing to your retirement portfolio.”³

Do you know how the funds in your investment portfolio produce wealth?

The South Sea Company

While recent discussions mostly center around Handel’s investments in the RAC (1720-1732), the composer/entrepreneur/investor also held stocks in the South Sea Company (SSC) that were purchased a few years prior—by 1716. It appears that Handel in

this case made investments at his own initiative, like many Londoners of the time.

Around the time Handel settled in London, Parliament founded the SSC to increase Britain’s transatlantic slave trade and reduce the national debt. Employed in service to the court of King George I (when he wrote *Water Music*) Handel was making a comfortable salary. At that time, thousands of Londoners, including Handel, participated in what became a buying frenzy where stock value rose rapidly. Ultimately, stock value also fell rapidly in 1720 in what became known historically as the South Sea Bubble. Handel, portending a future of careful money management, sold his shares before the crash—nearly doubling his investment.



(The Pool of London. J. W. Carmichael)

London’s port– the departure point to the West African coast, the first leg of the triangle trade route, carrying goods to trade for enslaved Africans– destined for the colonies of the West Indies.

That Handel profited from investing in the SSC appears in modern writings as early as 2004, with Harris being a primary source. Curiously, however, when Harris talks about the SSC, she makes no mention that the company was a slave-trading enterprise.⁴

Why, in the early 21st century, was no attention paid to the ethics of Handel’s investment in the SSC? It would seem that the timing was not ripe. Indeed Britain, until

...continued on next page

GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL AND THE ROYAL AFRICAN COMPANY

...continued from previous page

2015, was still paying former enslavers for their financial loss from the abolition of slavery owing to the Slave Compensation Act 1837. In the United States, George W. Bush was president and Massachusetts had become the first state to legalize gay marriage. Paul talks about this omission:

When the South Sea Bubble burst in 1720, there was an outpouring of...commentary... centered [sic.] around ... themes of fraud and ruin. Three hundred years later, there is a renewed focus on the horrors of the slave trade.... Forced labour was an essential part of the Bubble story but is often erased from it Complaints by wealthy people about their losses have drowned out the voices of the enslaved.⁵

The story of the entanglement of Handel's financial holdings with the slave trade is evocative; however, what likely was more impactful to him, was the influence of the trade on London's economy at large, which supported Handel's career through his wealthy patrons and audiences—the London aristocracy. Without this support, could Handel have developed and shared his genius to the degree he did?

Repairing Harms and the Arts

During the decade following Dr. Hunter's discovery scholars, musicians, and organizational managers who study, play, and market western classical music have responded to this new awareness with programming. This acknowledgement feels particularly timely now, five years after George Floyd's murder and the Black Lives Matter movement, as the federal government dismantles DEI programs, civil rights groups file legal challenges and activists protest against federal overreach.

From Massachusetts to Maryland and beyond, creatives program musical events and convene experts across races to begin to redress harms and share ideas. Boston's Handel and Haydn Society created 'Crossing the Deep' in 2020 (repeated in 2025) that, "explores the resonances and juxtapositions between sacred music by Handel and Negro spirituals by enslaved Africans, written at the same time and often using the same Biblical texts." The National Philharmonic is donating part of the proceeds of Messiah performances to the Scotland A.M.E. Zion



Handel's handwritten manuscript.
"<https://www.interlochenpublicradio.org/2022-12-04/opinion-dont-mess-with-messiah>"

Church in Potomac, Maryland. The New York Philharmonic sponsored a panel discussion entitled, *The Unanswered Questions: Handel and the Royal African Company.*"

Increasingly we become aware that the building of wealth on the backs of enslaved Africans is pervasive throughout western culture and beyond. This discovery about Handel raises the question about how to reconcile that and similar cultural truths.

In the words of Austin Channing Brown:

"Our only chance at dismantling racial injustice is being more curious about its origins than we are worried about our comfort. It's not a comfortable conversation for any of us. It is haunting work to recall the sins of our past. But is this not the work we have been called to anyway? Is this not the work of the Holy Spirit to illuminate truth and inspire transformation?..."

For only by being truthful about how we got here can we begin to imagine another way."⁶

...continued on next page

NEW TAX BENEFIT FOR 2026 CONTRIBUTORS TO GOVANS

Besides the benefits of using a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) to contribute to Govans for a pledge or other gift (available to those age 73 and older who must take a Required Minimum Distribution, or RMD), there is also a new opportunity for other taxpayers to give to 501(c)(3) organizations like Govans even if they do not itemize deductions on their tax returns.

Under the 2025 federal tax bill, taxpayers may be able to claim a charitable deduction of up to **\$1,000 per year for single filers** and **\$2,000 per year for joint filers**.

Please check with your tax consultant or financial adviser to see whether you qualify for this new deduction, and consider supporting Govans in 2026 by taking advantage of this opportunity.



SUNDAY SCHOOL FOR CHILDREN OF ALL AGES

Sundays at 9:30 a.m. in the
Education Building

GOVANS/KNOX BIBLE STUDY

GOVANS 
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Wednesdays at 12:00 noon on Zoom

Everyone is welcome!



GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL AND THE ROYAL AFRICAN COMPANY

...continued from previous page

Endnotes:

¹Dr. Hunter, Librarian emeritus at University of Texas made this discovery. Dr. Ellen Harris, Musicologist, MIT, and a career specialist on Handel has been researching his financial records since 2004.

²Harris, E. (2020) "Master of the Orchester with a Salary": Handel at the Bank of England'

<https://youtu.be/tX-Fhkli49M?si=EHEPjLzimr4JkHcN>

⁴Harris, E. (Nov., 2004) Handel the Investor. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3526342>

⁵Paul, H. (2021). The South Sea Bubble and the Erasure of Slavery and Impressment. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0013838X.2021.1995971>

⁶I'm Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness (Crown Publishing: 2018)

 **GOVANS**
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
5828 York Road
Baltimore, MD 21212
410-435-9188
www.govanspres.org

*"Govans Presbyterian Church is a theologically progressive community
empowering people to make the world better."*

EASTER SUNDAY AT GOVANS

Sunday, April 5

Join us for worship at 10:30 a.m. and a visit from
the Easter Bunny and Egg Hunt to follow!