

In remembrance of great musician G.F. Handel

Concerts mark the 250th anniversary of his death

By ROSTISLAW SUCHIN

George F. Handel (1685-1759) is one of the most important figures in the international history of music. This year his music will be performed across the world in remembrance of his death 250 years ago. Along with Johann Sebastian Bach and Georg Philip-Telemann, he is one of the most significant icons of the baroque era.

The path of a grandmaster

George Frideric Handel was born on February 23, 1685 in the German city of Halle and at only four years of age he began learning the harpsichord from Friedrich Wilhelm Zachow.

As he grew older Handel found more and more pleasure in music and he made the decision to become a musician. Handel's father, who had to work hard to become

a doctor and the Elector's surgeon, disapproved of his career choice. He could not imagine that his son would later become one of the most brilliant musicians in history.

In 1704 Handel moved to Hamburg, where he worked as a violinist and harpsichordist at the opera house. Here he also wrote his first operas "Almira" and "Nero".

To learn more about opera Handel traveled to Italy, the birthplace of the genre. He wanted to learn from the great Italian composers and became friends with famous personalities such as Arcangelo Corelli, Antonio Lotti, Agostino Steffani, and Alessandro Scarlatti. The ease with which Handel wrote his pieces fascinated the Italians. Handel also possessed an incredible charisma that outshone everyone around him. They say his energy was boundless.

Between the metropolises

In 1710, at only 25 years of age, Handel earned the great honour of serving the Elector of Hanover as a Kapellmeister, or master of music. At that time his salary was already twenty-fold what Bach was earning in Weimar.

In the same year Handel traveled to London. After being introduced to Queen Anne, he created the masterpiece "Rinaldo" in only 14 days. In the following years Handel often commuted between London and Hanover. His operas were a great success in England and he was hired as the director of the Royal Academy of Music.

At age 52, Handel suffered a stroke, but recovered. Subsequently he decided to change direction and entered the genre of oratorios.

A new direction

The "Messiah" is his most im-

portant oratorio and one of the best pieces of clerical church music ever written. To write this work, Handel locked himself in his room. He prayed for divine messages and inspiration and after 24 days he finished his greatest masterpiece. It is said that he was moved to tears very often when writing the part "Hallelujah."

Kneeling down, the composer cried with hands extended toward heaven, "I see the heavens open!" Very moved from all he experienced he decided to earn no money from the composition and even arranged charity concerts.

At the end of his life Handel's health started to decline and he died on Good Friday, April 14, 1759.

2009: The year of Handel

All over the world and especially in Germany the 250th anniversary of Handel's death is honoured and his operas, oratorios and instrumental pieces are performed on a large scale.

Every year the Leo-Borchard



A floral tribute lies on the grave of composer George Frederic Handel in Poets Corner, Westminster Abbey on April 8, 2009 in London. Handel's fame was so great at the time of his death that his funeral at the Abbey attracted a crowd of 3,000 mourners. PETER MACDIARMID/GETTY IMAGES

music school in Berlin performs the masterpieces of composers of the baroque era.

This years event was devoted to Handel. His oratorios "Messiah" and "Semele" were performed

at the closing concert on May 24. Students and professional singers rehearsed the arias and duets with big names like vocal professor Charlotte Lehmann, and baroque master Nigel Rogers.

Dutch Masters—and Mistresses—at the VAG

Holland's 'Golden Age' blossomed alongside science and trade

By CHRISTINA FERRERO

The fabulous Dutch Master's exhibit currently showing at the Vancouver Art Gallery is an enriching experience and a unique opportunity to see the treasures that Holland's Rijksmuseum has generously shared with the city.

The Golden Age of Dutch Art was unquestionably linked to the emergence of the Dutch Republic and its mastery of international trade in luxury items such as gold, pearls, silk, and spices.

Alongside this blossoming of art grew scientific knowledge, specifically in cartography and geography, astronomy and the development of the telescope and the microscope, and the camera obscura. The emergence of the burgher, or merchant middle class, dictated a brand new aesthetic sensibility, as 'new money' replaced the Church and the nobility's former exclusive role as art patrons.

On entering the show, one of the first works encountered is the only piece in the collection belonging to the VAG itself, a small scene of the Port of Amsterdam, depicting naval vessels and what appears to be an impromptu tea party on the beach where children, dogs, and couples stroll. It is a relatively peaceful, if busy, scene, and attests to the presence of that ever-changing 'Dutch light.'

In the realm of portraiture, the work of Wallerant Vaillant (1632-1677), a lovely and technically flawless portrait of one of only 25 women artists from the 17th century, shows Maria Von Oosterwijk, a flower painter who was widely collected and admired by the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Louis XIV, and the King of England, to name but three of her distinguished clientele.

At 41 and single (she never married) Von Oosterwijk exudes self-possession and beauty, and displays her wealth in costly ribbons, lace and sumptuous silks. She holds a book, symbolizing her knowledge, in one hand and a painter's palette and brushes in the other.



The Love Letter by Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675). VANCOUVER ART GALLERY AND RIJKSMUSEUM

Von Oosterwijk was the exception at that time in Holland. For the most part, women artists came from the family of a painter, or married into one, and most of them studied under male teachers, or 'masters' such as Rembrandt. Floral artists had to familiarize themselves not only with botanical knowledge but also with the 'language of flowers.' These bouquets held not just a flower arrangement but a story, a myth, a play on words, a joke.

The work of Rachel Ruysch, executed on canvas in oil, is a superb example. Her painting, which hangs beside a very 'show-offy' piece by her male counterpart, Jan Davidz de Heem (1606-16830), is every bit as

good if not better than De Heem's. De Heem's piece shows many of the same flowers, but the arrangement itself lacks sophistication. And although it is executed on copper plate, assuming a smoother finish, it fails to compete with Ruysch's Still Life with Flowers on a Marble Table Top, circa 1726.

This is an exquisite arrangement, the carnation modestly hiding its full bloom, the peonies (forgetfulness) side-by-side with the forget-me-nots, the cabbage rose falling softly to rest on the cool marble. These roses were associated with the Virgin Mary, and the other prominent blossom, a cistus, signifies the stigmata of Christ.

Upon moving to Amsterdam, Rembrandt (1606-1669) made a series of small un-commissioned portraits, called tronies or 'mug shots,' to sell on the open market and establish a clientele for more formalized portraiture. One brilliant example is An Oriental, circa 1635, a portrait of an old man wearing a turban.

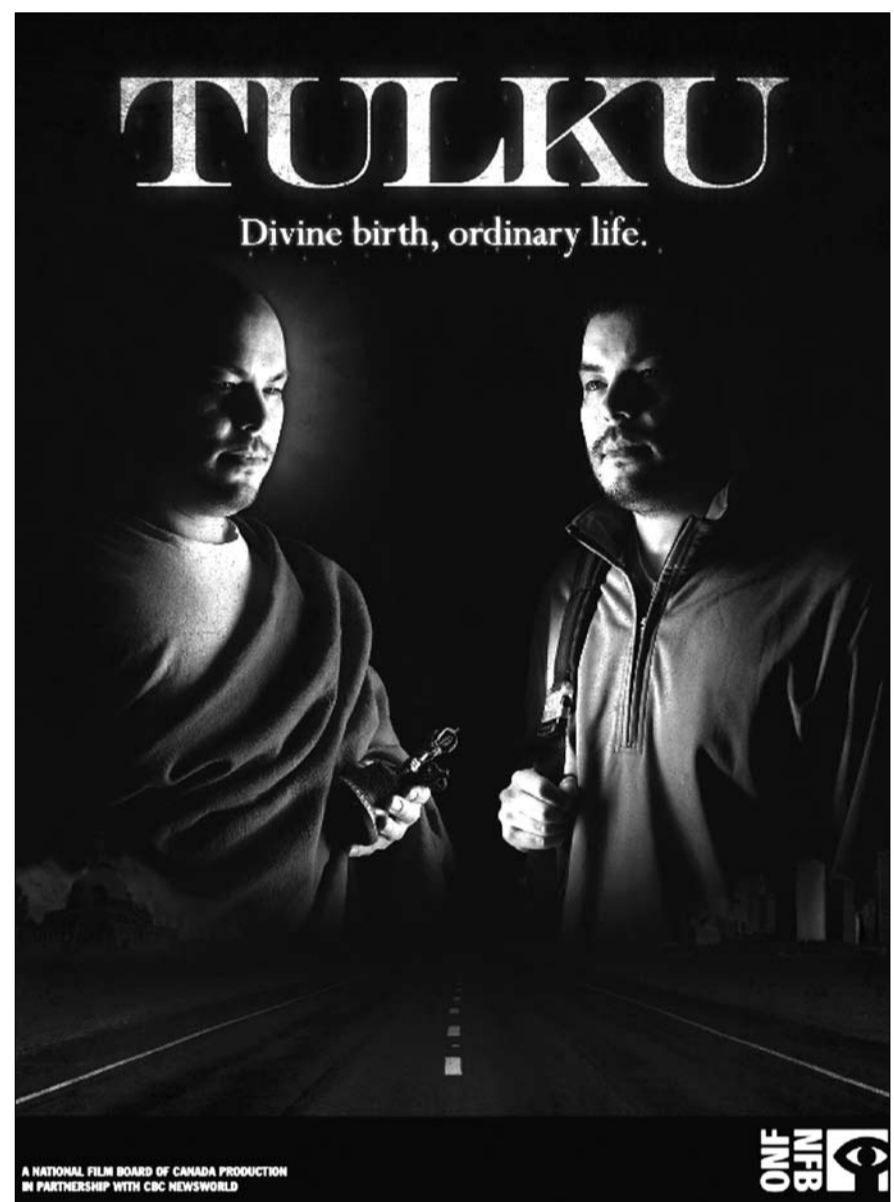
Rembrandt's fame grew, as did his coterie of students, but it is undeniable who student and master are when we compare it to Aert de Gelder's King David (1680). The turban, for example, has superb texture in the Rembrandt, and the eyes come alive.

Vermeer closes the show in an apropos grouping that includes lovers, mistresses and courtesans. The Love Letter, a small but significant painting by Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675) is nothing short of amazing.

Vermeer only left about thirty-five paintings, yet every one is a gem. The compositions make use of various vanishing points, and feature great depth of field, a masterful use of light, and typically poised, self-contained women in domestic scenes. In The Love Letter, the viewer is placed, voyeuristically, in a scullery, the curtain to which is half-drawn so that the gaze is directed outward into a prosperous and beautiful drawing room.

Objects seen from the scullery—a laundry basket, a broom, discarded slippers—all point to the identities of the two women in the piece. There is a complicity in the glance they exchange, as the mistress holds an as yet unopened love letter, her cast-off slippers and the painting of a ship at sea all alluding to her identity as a lover. She is a wealthy woman, holding a lute (another symbol of love), as her servant-girl smiles up at her, the housework left undone.

"Vermeer, Rembrandt and the Golden Age of Dutch Art" runs until September 13 at the Vancouver Art Gallery, 750 Hornby Street (www.vanartgallery.bc.ca).



'Tulku,' the first film of its kind, tells a story of a young man trying to find his role in traditional Tibetan Buddhism while living a modern life. COURTESY OF NFB

Film Review: 'Tulku'

By HELENA ZHU
Epoch Times Staff

Gesar Mukpo, the son of a Tibetan father and a Western mother, was enthroned at age three as the reincarnation of Shechen Kongtrul Rinpoche, a Tibetan teacher, who is believed to have died in a Chinese prison during the Great Cultural Revolution. Born in Berkeley, California Gesar has turned his unique life experience into a documentary exploring the lives of young people caught between the modern culture they were born into and the ancient Tibetan Buddhist culture they inherited.

Tulkus are believed to be incarnated Tibetan Buddhist masters. Dating back to the 16th century Tibet, a tradition began that when a Buddhist master died he would be reincarnated in a young child. Tulkus were recognized and appointed at a very young age—anywhere from birth to six years old. A familiar example would be the tulku lineage of the Dalai Lama.

Beginning in the 1970's tulkus began to be found in the West, and some of them were not ethnically Tibetan. The documentary "Tulku", a first-of-its-kind film presented by the National Film Board of Canada, describes such a case. Gesar Mukpo, the writer and director of the film, tells a vivid story of Western tulkus through his own experience and the experience of other young western tulkus.

Growing up as a Western tulku, Mukpo has continuously attempt-

ed to find his role in the world and understand what it means to be a Western tulku. Traveling throughout Canada, England, Germany, India, Tibet and Nepal, he encountered many Buddhist masters—some of whom were students of Shechen. He also met several other Western tulkus who shared many of the same difficulties in understanding their role in the world and the Buddhist tradition they inherited.

He does not recall much of what he knew in his previous lifetime, apart from "having some memories of walking up the hillside [in Tibet]. "The buildings in Tibet were exactly as I remembered them," he says. Not your average traditional Buddhist, Gesar still appreciates that he has "found a tradition with compassion and kindness" in this lifetime.

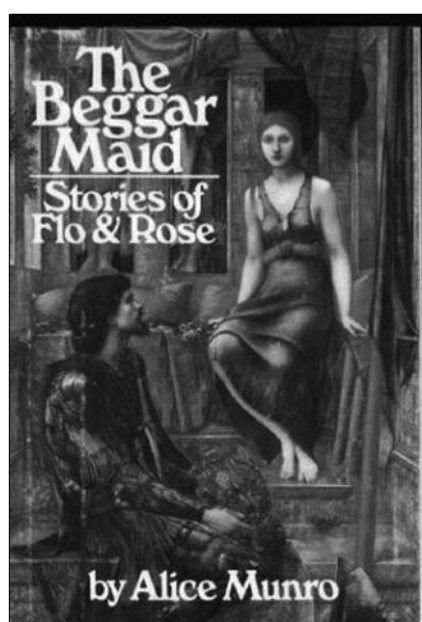
Choosing not to live in a traditional monastery, Mukpo currently leads a more or less ordinary life in Halifax, Nova Scotia. He sees value in the tradition he was drawn into at such a young age and seeks to "self-discover" and "self-improve"—things he considers to be important as a Western Buddhist.

"Tulku" will be screened at the Touched by Tibet film festival at the Vancity Theatre (1181 Seymour Street, Vancouver, B.C.) on Saturday, June 13th at 6:30pm.

For a trailer of "Tulku," please see http://www.nfb.ca/film/tulku_trailer/

Canadian short story writer wins booker

Alice Munro honored for 'depth, wisdom, and precision'



Munro

LONDON (Reuters)—Canadian short story writer Alice Munro won the 2009 Man Booker International Prize, worth \$96,000.

The 77-year-old became the third author to win the biennial prize, the international version of Britain's top literary award, the Man Booker Prize.

"I am totally amazed and delighted," said Munro, best known for her short stories and one of Canada's most celebrated writers. She beat competition from shortlisted authors including V.S. Naipaul, Peter Carey, and Mario Vargas Llosa.

The panel of judges said in a statement: "Alice Munro is mostly known as a short story writer and yet she brings as much depth, wis-

dom, and precision to every story as most novelists bring to a lifetime of novels."

"To read Alice Munro is to learn something every time that you never thought of before."

Munro was born in Ontario, Canada in 1931 and in 1963 she moved to Victoria where she and her husband established Munro Books.

Her first collection of stories, "Dance of the Happy Shades" (1968), won the Canadian literary prize the Governor General's Award, and three years later her "Lives of Girls and Women" picked up the Canadian Booksellers Association International Book Year Award.

In 1980, "The Beggar Maid" was shortlisted for the annual Booker Prize for Fiction.