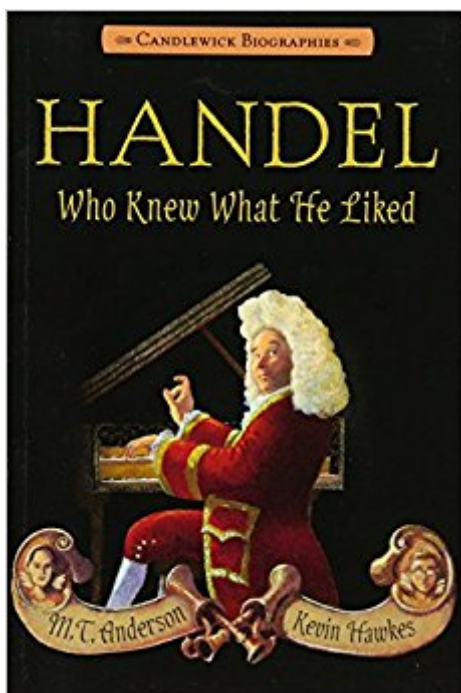


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# Handel, Who Knew What He Liked: Candlewick Biographies



## Synopsis

A droll biography reveals the high notes and the low notes in the life of the world's foremost composer of Baroque music. This is not your usual picture book biography. Nor was George Frideric Handel your everyday eighteenth-century composer. This witty and yet rigorously researched and accessible biography captures Handel's essential spirit from a child who smuggled a clavichord into the attic to play music against his father's orders to a young man who imported forty-five pounds of mountain snow to chill wine for a gala as well as his remarkable, enduring musical triumphs. But M. T. Anderson also shows Handel's struggles and chronicles the illness, ill fortune, and despair that led to his greatest achievement, the Messiah. With impeccable detail and a wink at the reader, Kevin Hawkes illustrates the singular story of Handel and the music through which he lives on.

## Book Information

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Age Range: 8 - 12 years

Grade Level: 3 - 7

## Customer Reviews

In this wittily irreverent picture-book biography, the legendary baroque composer is vividly brought to life. "You'd have to be sure of yourself to wear a wig that gigantic," the author points out archly on the first page, commenting on an accompanying portrait of George Frideric himself. Meanwhile,

perched above the ornately decorated text box, a fly (as in "fly on the wall") looks on. This sort of sassy visual and verbal repartee sets the tone for a fresh and funny take on history, and Anderson (Burger Wuss) does a bang-up job of condensing and explaining the major (and more colorful minor) events of the composer's larger-than-life career. For his part, Hawkes has a field day slipping in sly visual asides, including an ancestral portrait that looks down in surprise at the young Handel smuggling a clavichord past his disapproving parents, and a pair of feuding divas in a catfight. Like all grand opera, there's pathos as well, most particularly in the events surrounding the writing of the "Messiah," and Hawkes's lush and sweeping acrylic paintings pick up on the more poignant as well as the puckish elements. The author comically debunks popular myths as well, such as the tradition of a standing ovation during the "Hallelujah Chorus" originating with the king: "This story is almost certainly not true, but it is a good story nonetheless." Unobtrusive sidebars explain a variety of musical terminology, and a discography and timeline of Handel's life are also included. These gifted collaborators deserve a Hallelujah Chorus of their own for this volume, as well as a request for a speedy encore. Ages 8-12. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Gr 1-5-In this picture-book biography, both illustration and text are characterized by a saucy style, impeccable pacing, and a richness of content, and the two harmonize splendidly in a manner befitting the subject. Anderson's words and anecdotes are well chosen, and his sense of timing heightens impact whether describing mischievous childhood antics of the classical composer (the boy smuggling a clavichord past unsuspecting parents) or solemn occasions (the circumstances surrounding the creation and performances of the Messiah). The author is also adept at conveying the spirit and flavor of Handel's music. Hawkes's highly textured acrylics manage to combine depth and drama with a great sense of fun. Double-page spreads display a shimmering River Thames during a performance of Water Music as well as ornate opera halls and drawing rooms. Close inspection of the scenes and the elaborately carved frames surrounding the text reveal comedic cameos. The attention to detail extends to a whimsical, scrolled Latin copyright message and graceful gold arabesques on the endpapers. Clear definitions of technical terms are embedded in decorative panels throughout. This performance is worthy of a standing ovation. Wendy Lukehart, Washington DC Public Library Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I read this book to my 4th grade music students. It has a tiny amount of humor, and makes students

feel connected to Handel as a person, not just a composer. They especially like the part that describes Handel's duel with Matheson. I recommend this book to fellow elementary music teachers. It takes about 20 minutes to read aloud.

I am an elementary school music teacher and I read this book to my fourth and fifth grade students. The book held their interest from beginning to end. Both the text and illustrations are excellent. Not only does it tell about the life of Handel, but it also is an example of choosing a path in life that follows one's interest and love. At the end of the reading I played two different short excerpts from The Messiah (one was a "rock" version) and they loved it. But I knew it was a successful lesson when I happened to walk through the lunch room and two of my students (boys) were having a discussion about re-enacting a scene from the book where Handel's best friend challenged him to a duel. The discussion between the boys went something like this: "I'll be Handel!" "No, I want to be Handel!!" It's moments like that that make teaching so rewarding!!

So cool! Love it! Thanks author, illustrator and seller!

It's very difficult for me to assign a number of stars to this book. On the one hand, I can see the value of this book for children in the 8-12-years category. It introduces them to Handel, gives a lot of information about the period he lived in, and tells the story of his musical life, while giving some interesting anecdotes in sidebars. There is a LOT of information packed into this book. And, the title is wonderful, and its meaning resonates in the story. On the other hand, I was disappointed in the way this book sounded when read. It sounds uninteresting, flat, with no peaks. This may be due to the nature of the sentences. Subject-Verb-Object -- sentence after sentence after sentence follows this pattern, making the telling of the story sound plodding. I missed a sense of cause-and-effect, a sense of movement, a sense of relationships, a sense of varying sentence structure. Anderson is a talented writer, so I don't know if he did this deliberately, thinking it served some purpose, or if he fell into it without thinking because he was writing a picture book. In addition, the pages are dark: dark colors, dark art. I'm not sure why this was considered necessary, or why somebody thought it enhanced the story. I would have to say this book is worth reading for its information, but not for the way the story is told.

There are not many 8-12 year olds who would willingly pick up a biography of Handel or any other musician from "ancient" history. However, M.T. Anderson's and Kevin Hawkes' witty yet factful story

with illustrations that would appeal to the younger and not repel the older reader is engaging and will capture their attention. So the reader that needs to learn to read biographies yet would find the typical versions unappealing has a great choice in this biography. The author brings out that as a child HANDEL was willful and intent on getting his way and do what he liked - playing music. He grew to be a man strong in spirit who took control of who he was and what he did and where he did it. His music has survived since the early 1700s. The young reader will enjoy the drama in the story-telling, the humor, and the tidbits of additional information tucked at the bottom or side of the pages. I think it is very appropriate to review this book and bring respect to the composer of The Messiah - one of the greatest and most inspiring oratorios ever written - George Frederick Handel, as the Christmas season approaches and choirs across the world will sound forth the glorious chords and vibrant message in music of The Messiah. Like the author, M.T. Anderson, I too have sung parts of The Messiah. My husband sang it with the University of North Carolina choir years ago. We thank you, Mr. Handel for this wondrous music. I encourage parents, music teachers, classroom teachers, and librarians to get a copy of this biography of Handel for their readers age 8-12. DISCLOSURE: I was provided a complimentary copy for the purpose of this review. I received no compensation and was not required to write a positive review.

On the opening page of M.T. Anderson's and Kevin Hawkes' new picture book biography is a portrait of Handel with a bit of commentary attached. "This is George Frideric Handel. He looks very satisfied with things. He's smiling a little, as if he's very sure of himself. You'd have to be sure of yourself to wear a wig that gigantic." And that, in a nutshell, describes this world famous composer. Handel was a man who knew what he wanted. Even as a child he was headstrong and decisive. He knew what he liked, he didn't care what others thought, and he made it happen. He was a man of force and spirit who controlled his own destiny, and in doing so became one of the most beloved and respected composers in the world; a man whose music has lived on for centuries..... M.T. Anderson's witty and irreverent text is full of history, marvelous anecdotes of some famous and not so famous events, fun facts, and trivia, and enhanced by Kevin Hawkes lush and expressive artwork. Young and old alike will relish the drama, humor, and brilliant detail in each picture. With sidebars within the text explaining musical terminology, and a timeline of Handel's life, and lists of recordings and other biographies at the end, Handel: Who Knew What He Liked, is a joyous, fun-filled masterpiece that is sure to whet the appetites of youngsters 8-12. One of the best new books of 2001, this is definitely a biography that shouldn't be missed!

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