

# NEWSLETTER of the American Handel Society

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Spring 2024

## HANDEL: MADE IN AMERICA

*Mark P. Risinger*



*Terrance McKnight and the Voices of Harlem chorus. Photo credit: HanJie Chow.*

A stage filled with instrumentalists and singers, all African American; a celebrated radio personality telling an intriguing personal tale mixed with biographical incidents from the life of Handel; and a variety of music by Handel, punctuating the narration at intervals and alternating with American songs and spirituals—these disparate elements were fused together to create a unique and inspiring performance experience at New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Grace Rainey Rogers Auditorium on February 15 and 16, 2024, entitled “Handel: Made in America.”

Presented under the aegis of the museum’s MetLiveArts series, the performance was a co-creation of the radio host Terrance McKnight, director Pat Eakin Young, and dramaturg and Handel scholar Ellen T. Harris. The “Creators’ Statement” included in the program presents the premise:

In the eighteenth century, the growth of Britain’s international trading companies . . . brought huge profits into the teeming metropolis of London, which became a mecca for domestic and foreign emigres

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## TERENCE BEST (1929–2024)



*Photo credit: Thomas Ziegler*

It was with great sadness that we learned of the passing of our dear friend and esteemed colleague Terence Best on January 10th of this year at the age of 94. Terence exemplified that noble British tradition of outstanding scholarship carried on outside the conventional confines of the academy. After graduating from Jesus College, Oxford, and doing military service in Korea, Terence joined the staff of Brentwood School in 1956 as a master in modern languages. There he remained, by all accounts a favorite teacher, until his retirement in 1990.

Meanwhile, he energetically pursued his musical interests, advancing from accomplished amateur harpsichordist to leading authority on Handel’s life

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hoping for financial opportunity. Many artists and artisans poured into the city for a share of its wealth, among them the German composer George Frideric Handel. . . .

Terrance McKnight, connecting 18th-century England and modern-day America, traces Handel's life, weaving it through his own story as a rising Black classical pianist in America, while reflecting on the history of global capitalism that both enslaved his ancestors and enabled Handel's music. As Handel's music intersects again and again with McKnight's life, not only through art, but through the history and continued impact of slavery, each point of intersection asks us to consider what is the real price of art and to whom does this music belong?

Preceding the concert was a panel discussion, moderated by Eric Copage, in a conversation with Juilliard ethnomusicologist Fredara Hadley and Professor Harris. Much of that discussion centered around understanding and explaining Handel's connection to a cultural and financial world inextricably linked to and dependent on the overseas slave trade. Harris, who in recent years has done extensive research on Handel's finances, provided a helpful perspective on the composer's relationship to those companies whose earnings relied on slavery. All the panelists agreed on the importance of recognizing the implications of these companies not only for Handel's art but also for the cultural development in London society as a whole during this period.

Because Handel's music had been important and deeply personal in McKnight's life, it became the focal point of his reflection and exploration. The key moments of Handel's biography that received attention were his health crisis in the late 1730s (later described by his librettist Charles Jennens as a "paralytick disorder") and his move away from composing Italian opera and in favor of English oratorio during roughly the same time. Regarding Handel's temporary paralysis, McKnight drew a parallel to his own life-changing injury that occurred while pursuing graduate studies in piano performance, effectively ending his dreams of a concert career. He was forced to seek a new relationship with music, to reorient his aspirations toward activities requiring less manual dexterity.

McKnight has a journalist's way with words, if not an historian's concern for nuanced chronology: he connected his own "pivot" in exploring new career paths with Handel's supposed "pivot" as he recovered from his health crisis and went from composing operas to oratorios. According to McKnight's narrative, Handel experienced a change of heart about composing courtly entertainment, equating it with his relationship to companies tied to slavery, and chose instead to forge a new path that focused more closely on spiritual matters in English oratorios—a path that allowed him to eschew financial ties to companies that profited from human suffering. Handel scholars, of course, are aware that the historical evidence does not present quite so tidy a narrative.

"Handel: Made in America" accomplished their goal of "celebrat[ing] and deconstruct[ing] some of Handel's most moving works, situating them in and against Black American traditions and wrestling with the problem of a music that is at the same time universal and exclusionary, divinely transcendent and implicated in some of the darkest crimes of humanity." The fourteen-piece instrumental ensemble, conducted largely from the keyboard by Malcolm Merriweather, played stylishly and with great sensitivity. They were matched by the singing of an impressive ensemble of Voices of Harlem, along with four featured soloists: soprano Latonia Moore, mezzo-soprano J'Nai Bridges, tenor Noah Stewart, and baritone Davóne Tines. The selections from Handel included several instrumental movements from early suites and concerti grossi; arias drawn from *Deborah*, *Samson*, *Messiah*, *Giulio Cesare in Egitto*, and *Alexander Balus*; as well as the chorus "How strange their ends, and yet how glorious" from *Theodora*. Each soloist was featured in at least one piece by Handel and one from the American tradition. Among the soloists, Moore made by far the strongest impression, particularly in her lovely rendition of "Convey me to some peaceful shore" from *Alexander Balus*. Among the pieces of musical Americana that alternated with the Handelian selections, the spirituals "Lord, I Know I've Been Changed" and "Follow the Drinking Gourd" were included alongside familiar favorites such as "Amazing Grace" and "That Old Time Religion." Particularly effective was the concluding musical sequence, in which the *Theodora* chorus transitioned seamlessly into "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands." The audience responded with rapturous applause.

and works. Even before his first visit to Halle in 1973, he edited the third volume of the keyboard music for the Hallische Händel-Ausgabe in 1970, and he went on to edit more volumes of the HHA than anyone in its history, a record never likely to be surpassed. In addition to preparing some eleven volumes dedicated to instrumental music, he produced magisterial editions of *Tamerlano*, *Radamisto* (both versions), *Deidamia*, *Riccardo Primo*, *La Resurrezione*, and *Lucio Cornelio Silla*. At the same time, he acted as mentor and advisor to many other editors. The indispensable arbiter on matters of Italian language, he also translated countless prefaces from German into English. He served on the Editorial Board of the HHA from the creation of that body in 1984 until 2019, from 1998 as Co-General Editor. A founding member of the Handel Institute in London, Terence edited the proceedings of its 1990 conference, the seminal *Handel Collections and Their History* (Oxford, 1993), and published numerous erudite articles. In Halle he was awarded the city's Handel Prize in 1990 and was elected Vice-President of the Georg-Friedrich-Händel-Gesellschaft in 1998 and an Honorary Member in 2010. An honorary doctoral degree was conferred on him by the Martin Luther Universität Halle-Wittenberg in 2003.

Those of us lucky enough to have enjoyed Terence's company during gatherings in Halle, London, or assorted venues of the American Handel Society, will warmly remember his charm, modesty, and kindness, often as he shared tales of his storied career over a glass of Chianti or Dunkelweizen. We will sorely miss his presence among us, even while we continue to reap the benefits of his manifold contributions to Handel scholarship in years to come.

— John H. Roberts

## CALL FOR PAPERS: 2025 AMERICAN HANDEL SOCIETY CONFERENCE, BOSTON, MA



Image credit: Freepik.com

The biennial conference of the American Handel Society will take place in Boston, Massachusetts, from February 6–9, 2025. The conference will include academic panels, the Howard Serwer Memorial Lecture given by Dr. Ayana Smith (Associate Professor of Music at Indiana University Bloomington), and performances by Boston's Handel and Haydn Society and the Boston Early Music Festival.

The Society invites submissions of abstracts for papers on any topic connected with Handel's life, his music, his close contemporaries, or the contexts in which his music was composed or performed. Given the setting, the Program Committee would especially welcome papers dealing with the performance, reception, and circulation of Handel's music in Boston, the American colonies and post-revolutionary America, or elsewhere on the American continent. Abstracts of up to 500 words should be sent to **Wendy Heller** (wbheller@princeton.edu) by **September 15, 2024**.

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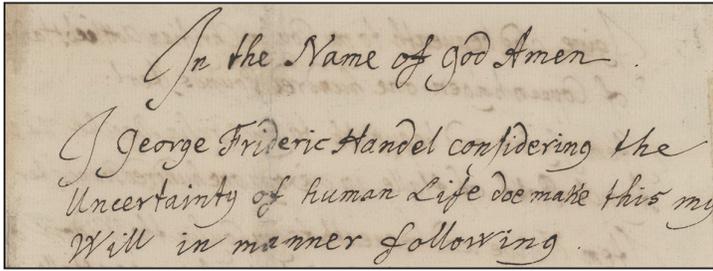
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## “HANDEL’S WILL: LOVE AND LEGACY”: AN EXHIBITION AT THE FOUNDLING MUSEUM, LONDON

Katharine Hogg



Opening statement of Handel’s will. Courtesy of the Gerald Coke Handel Foundation.

In 1750 Handel wrote out two copies of his will, one to lodge with his lawyer, George Amyand, and one for himself. Over his remaining years he added four codicils to both copies. These documents displayed in the exhibition titled “Handel’s Will: Love and Legacy” at the Foundling Museum (October 20, 2023, to June 30, 2024) offer a rare glimpse of his personal as well as his professional life, naming friends as well as colleagues, placing his servants at the head of his list of beneficiaries, and reflecting his compassion for those who had not achieved the comfort and status he enjoyed.

The exhibition investigates the people who benefited from his will, as well as the charities he endowed. Unusually, the first beneficiary named is his servant Peter Le Blond, and Handel goes on to make bequests to his colleagues and friends, although only one performer—Matthew Dubourg—is included. His most significant bequest is probably to his assistant and agent, John Christopher Smith, Sr., who received “my large harpsichord, my little house organ, my musick books and five hundred pounds.” The “musick books” were the autograph manuscripts now in the British Library, and Handel was doubtless ensuring the survival of his musical legacy by giving them to a musician and colleague who would appreciate their importance.

Other beneficiaries include his neighbours and friends: the apothecary John Gowland (inventor of Gowland’s Lotion to improve the complexion, referenced by Jane Austen); James Smyth, perfumer to His Majesty; and the art and music collector Bernard Granville. Handel’s librettists Thomas Morell, Newburgh Hamilton, and Charles Jennens are all remembered, and he carefully allocated objects and cash according to their wealth. He reserved financial bequests for those who might be more in need and gave art works to some of his more affluent friends, although many of these received nothing at all. One conspicuous absentee is the artist and scene designer Joseph Goupy, with whom Handel worked for some years at the theater. Goupy’s unkind caricatures of Handel, created and published after a

falling out when Handel refused to compose for Goupy’s patron, are displayed in the exhibition; these presumably caused the permanent rift in their relationship.

The composer retained his links with Halle through his family, and although he was not a regular visitor, he maintained close ties with his relatives, in particular his niece and executor Johanna Floercken. Several changes in the codicils acknowledge the deaths of various relatives, reallocating their bequests, and a dispute about one adjustment is recorded in the documents exhibited on loan from the Royal College of Music.

In his will Handel requested to be buried “in a private manner” at Westminster Abbey and allotted £600 for a monument to be erected. In the event, the funeral was a grand affair attended by 3,000 people, according to the *Gentleman’s Magazine*, referenced in the exhibition. The monument in Westminster Abbey was commissioned from the leading sculptor Louis-François Roubiliac, who had created the Handel statue for Vauxhall Gardens (now at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London). A terracotta maquette of the monument, which differs from the final sculpture, is on display. A transcription of a document preserved at the British Library, itemizing the contents of Handel’s house for a sale valuation is shown, offering useful information about the layout of the house on Brook Street and how the rooms were used.

Also showcased alongside the original will and the codicils are portraits, documents, and musical scores relating to the bequests and beneficiaries, and exploring the context for Handel’s support of two charities. He left £1,000 to the “Society for the support of decay’d Musicians and their families,” now The Royal Society of Musicians, and the Society’s founding document, the 1738 Declaration of Trust, is displayed, listing Handel’s name among the 228 signatories which read like a rollcall of musicians in London at the time. Handel’s gift to the Foundling Hospital was not cash as might be expected, but rather he directed that a copy of the score and parts of *Messiah* be presented to them. His benefit concerts for the Hospital had raised about £7,000 for the charity, and this bequest would ensure that the annual performances of *Messiah* could continue. The score and parts were duly copied and donated to the Hospital and are included in the display. While Handel’s original motivation for supporting the Hospital is not clear, the exhibition references his early life in Halle, where the Franckesche Stiftungen would have been known to him as a charitable organization similar to the Foundling, providing a home for children.

The display draws on research undertaken by Ellen T. Harris and Donald Burrows, among others, and published in *Handel’s Will: Facsimiles and Commentary*, edited by Donald Burrows (London: Gerald Coke Handel Foundation, 2009).

## FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

I would like to congratulate the recipients of the J. Merrill Knapp Research Fellowships listed elsewhere in this issue of the *Newsletter*, and to thank the members of the committee, consisting of Roger Freitas, Ellen Exner, and Chair Alison DeSimone (herself a previous winner), for their conscientious deliberations. The Knapp Fellowship is offered every other year by the AHS to encourage research in the field of Handel and related studies by younger scholars.

Also, in this issue of the *Newsletter*, please note the Call for Papers for the next American Handel Society Conference to be held in Boston, MA on February 6–9, 2025. The Program Committee, chaired by Wendy Heller, hopes to receive a record number of proposals. The Local Arrangements Committee, chaired by Ellen Harris, is planning an exciting program of concerts and other events to supplement the paper sessions, and has reserved a block of rooms in the conveniently located Colonnade Hotel with special rates for attendees. Details concerning program and registration will be available on the AHS website and in future issues of the *Newsletter*, but please put the dates on your calendar now and plan to attend what promises to be a splendid event.

At the suggestion of longtime AHS member Mark Goldberg, I would like to take this occasion to remind AHS members that Handel-E, <https://groups.io/g/Handel-e>, the successor to Handel-L, is still active and welcomes new members. It is a lightly moderated online discussion group for all things Handelian and is completely free to join. Subscribers can post messages and can arrange to receive emails with the postings or receive periodic digests of such emails. Contributors include a mix of scholars, performers, and music lovers with an interest in Handel.

Finally, I would like to remind AHS members who wish to pay their dues for the Handel Institute and/or the Georg-Friedrich-Händel-Gesellschaft in US dollars through the AHS for the current year—either online or by check—to do so by May 15, 2024, in order to ensure a timely receipt of member benefits. Detailed information is available on the Membership Form.

— Graydon Beeks

## MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

Renew your membership for 2024 today! To renew online, go to <https://www.americanhandelsociety.org/join>, or renew by mail using the membership form on page 7 of this *Newsletter*. Go Green and opt to receive the *Newsletter* via email.

## ANNOUNCEMENT: J. MERRILL KNAPP RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP WINNERS

The winners of the Knapp Fellowship for 2024 are **Paul Feller** and **Peter Kohanski**. Both projects promise to shed new light on the ways in which Handel's music was heard, performed, and reinterpreted by different types of eighteenth-century listeners around the world.



**Paul Feller** is currently a Ph.D. candidate in Musicology at Northwestern University; his dissertation focuses on Jewish-Christian cultural exchanges in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. He will use the Knapp Fellowship to travel to Amsterdam and visit the Ets Haim Library and the Stadsarchief in order to consult the Hebrew libretto translations of Handel's *Esther* as well as synagogal music by Christian Joseph Lidarti. Feller's project shows the impact of Handel's oratorios within the late eighteenth-century Dutch Sephardic community.

**Peter Kohanski** is a Ph.D. candidate in Musicology at the University of North Texas. With the fellowship, Kohanski will conduct research at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, focusing on the papers of Elizabeth Graeme Fergusson, to answer questions about how Handel's music contributed to imperial identities in colonial Philadelphia, especially through the lens of gender. Kohanski's dissertation project uncovers ways in which Handel's music was an integral and ingrained part of colonial lives, from Philadelphia to Calcutta, and to the Caribbean.



The Knapp Committee had an especially rich pool of applicants this year. I am grateful to my colleagues Roger Freitas and Ellen Exner for their time and contributions to the selection process. Thank you also to all the applicants and their work on Handel and his world.

— Alison DeSimone, Chair  
Knapp Fellowship Committee

## RECENT PUBLICATIONS

Arrandale, Karen. *Edward J. Dent: A Life of Words and Music*. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2023.

Burrows, Donald. "'Lost' Movements from the Early Performances of Handel's *Messiah*." *Musical Times* 164, no. 1965 (Winter 2023): 89–106.

Harris, Ellen T. "Anne Donnellan: Friend of the Arts." In *Literature and the Arts: Interdisciplinary Essays in Memory of James Anderson Winn*, edited by Anna Battigelli, 151–81. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2024.

Johnson, Blake. "Performer, Composer and Impresario: Thomas Vincent Jr. (c.1723–1798) and the Oboe in London, 1748–1768." *Early Music* 51, no. 2 (2023): 203–16, <https://doi.org/10.1093/em/caad001>.

———. "What Handel Learned in Hamburg: The Composers of the Hamburg Opera and the Development of the Oboe as an Obligato Instrument, 1691–1705." *Early Music Performance and Research* 52, no. 1 (2023): 10–24, <https://online.fliphtml5.com/xefal/tctb>.

Ketterer, Robert C. "Recognition Scenes: Handel's *Oreste*, Audience Reception, and Competition at the London Opera." In *Opera, Tragedy, and Neighbouring Forms from Corneille to Calzabigi*, edited by Blair Hoxby, 202–26. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2024.

Lee, Jonathan Rhodes. Review of *Bach, Handel and Scarlatti: Reception in Britain 1750–1850* by Mark

Kroll (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022). *BACH: Journal of the Riemenschneider Bach Institute* 55, no.1 (2024): 123–28.

McGeary, Thomas. "Miscellany on the London Stage." *Early Music* (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1093/em/caad041>. Review of *The Power of Pastiche: Musical Miscellany and Cultural Identity in Early Eighteenth-Century England* by Alison C. DeSimone (Clemson, SC: Clemson University Press, 2021).

Timms, Colin. *Music, Books and Theatre in Eighteenth-Century Exton: A Context for Handel's 'Comus'*. RMA Monographs 41. Abingdon: Routledge, 2024.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### Halle Handel Festival

"Oh là là! Handel? - French inspirations"

May 24–June 9, 2024

<https://haendelhaus.de/hfs/startseite>

### International Scholarly Conference, Halle (Saale)

"Endless Beauties: George Frideric Handel and French Music Culture"

May 27–29, 2024

<https://www.haendel.de/scholarly-handel-conference/?lang=en>

### 11th Annual Handel Aria Competition

Friday, August 9, 2024, 7:30 PST

Grace Episcopal Church, Madison, Wisconsin

Open to the public and live streamed internationally.

<https://handelariacompetition.org/2022-competition>

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## American Handel Society

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I agree to have the following listed in the Directory of AHS Members (check as appropriate):  Address  Phone  Email

Donors and members of Rinaldo, Cleopatra, Theodora, and Messiah Circles — I consent to publishing my name on the AHS newsletter and website:

Yes  No  Anonymous

I would like my copy of the Newsletter delivered:  electronically  by mail

Class of Membership — Circle applicable cell(s) (for current calendar year, unless otherwise specified)	\$	£	€
Regular	40	30	35
Joint (one set of publications)	50	38	44
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Theodora Circle	250	190	220
Messiah Circle (Lifetime membership)	500	400	450
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Student	15	10	-
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Regular	45	-	40
Student*	20	-	15
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Regular	75	-	65
Regular (with <i>Göttinger Händel Beiträge</i> )	115	-	95
Student	27	-	21
Student (with <i>Göttinger Händel Beiträge</i> )	56	-	46
Dual Membership – Georg-Friedrich-Händel-Gesellschaft / Händel-Gesellschaft Karlsruhe*			
Regular	63	-	55
Student*	23	-	17.5
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Regular	93	-	80
Regular (with <i>Göttinger Händel Beiträge</i> )	125	-	105
Student	30	-	24
Student (with <i>Göttinger Händel Beiträge</i> )	60	-	48.5
<b>TOTAL REMITTANCE</b>			

\* This organization does not have a reduced rate for retirees.

† This organization has additional categories of Regular Membership that require a higher membership fee but provide additional benefits (see its website). Arrangements for these other categories may be made directly with Mrs. Pomeroy Kelly (see below).

Those paying in dollars should make their checks payable to AMERICAN HANDEL SOCIETY and mail them to Marjorie Pomeroy Kelly, Treasurer, AMERICAN HANDEL SOCIETY, 49 Christopher Hollow Road, Sandwich, MA 02563. Those wishing to pay in Euros should remit to Stephan Blaut, Treasurer, Georg-Friedrich-Händel-Gesellschaft, Gr. Nikolaistrasse 5, 06108 Halle (Saale), Federal Republic of Germany, and indicate that the payment is for the account of the AHS. Friends of the Handel Institute, London may also pay their AHS dues in sterling by making their checks payable to THE HANDEL INSTITUTE and mailing them to Ms. Sylvia Levi, Hon. Treasurer, The Handel Institute, 254A Kew Road, Richmond TW9 3EG, United Kingdom, with the appropriate annotation. Please do not send checks in Euros or sterling directly to the AHS as we are no longer able to process them.

Online payment options are available at <https://www.americanhandelsociety.org/join/>

**Payments in dollars for GFH or HI memberships must be received before May 15.**

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## American Handel Society

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