

NEWSLETTER

of

The American Handel Society

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HANDEL'S GREATEST HITS: THE COMPOSER'S MUSIC IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BENEFIT CONCERTS

Buried in *The London Stage* are advertisements for concerts including or devoted to Handel's music. Starting in the 1710s and continuing through the eighteenth century, musicians of all types used Handel's music on their concert programs, most especially during their benefit evenings.¹ These special events were dedicated to promoting a sole performer (or other members of the theatrical staff at a particular playhouse or concert hall). As was tradition, performers would have organized these events from beginning to end by hiring the other performers, renting the theater, creating advertisements, soliciting patrons, and programming the concert. Advertisements suggest that singers and instrumentalists employed Handel's music in benefit concerts for their own professional gain. They strategically programmed particular pieces that would convey specific narratives about their own talents, as well as their relationship to the popular composer.

Benefit concerts were prime opportunities for performers to construct a narrative, or a story, through their chosen program. On the one hand, concert programs allowed performers to evaluate and cater to perceptions of current taste. But benefit concerts could also reveal something about the performer him- or herself; these carefully organized events promoted the beneficiary in specific ways in order to entice audiences. Properly chosen pieces that suited both the performer's skills and audience taste would help bolster the beneficiary's reputation and fill his or her pockets with extra income. But benefits were always a gamble: not only could the size of the audience depend on something as fickle as bad weather, but a small audience could damage a performer's annual income, as well as his or her reputation.

Yet, it was a gamble that most were willing to take. By the early eighteenth century, the most prominent singers of the opera gave benefits, as well as some instrumentalists, and various employees associated with London's theatrical companies. The typical season for benefit performances occurred in the winter and spring, before the wealthier audience members left London

¹ Benefit concerts are different from benefits of plays or operas produced at London's theaters in this period. Singers, actors, and actresses who had contracts with a particular playhouse (such as Drury Lane or the Queen's Theatre) were often also contractually entitled to one benefit per season. Benefit concerts, on the other hand, were mostly independently produced and afforded beneficiaries a little more control over the event. For the main literature on eighteenth-century benefits, see Robert D. Hume, "The Origins of the Actor Benefit in London," *Theatre Research International* 9/2 (1984): 99-111; David McKenty, "The Benefit System in Augustan Drama" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1966); and St. Vincent Troubridge, *The Benefit System in the British Theatre* (London: The Society for Theatre Research, 1967).

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REPORT FROM HALLE



The Handel Festival in Halle took place this year from Friday, May 27 to Sunday, June 12, 2016 with the theme "History – Myth – Enlightenment." Following the pattern established last year, the Festival extended over three weekends. The Opening Concert, which had been a feature of recent Festivals, was not given. Instead, the first major musical event was the premiere of the new staging of *Sosarme, Re di Media* at the Opera House, using performing materials prepared by Michael Pacholke for the Hallische Händel-Ausgabe (HHA). Handel began setting this story of dynastic conflict between father and son as *Fernando, Re di Castiglia*, and located the tale in the Portuguese court of Dionysius I in the early 14th Century. Presumably because of the close political and military ties between Britain and Portugal, he subsequently changed the location to ancient Lydia some 600 years before Christ and changed the names of the characters accordingly. The Halle staging by Philipp Harnoncourt updated the action to an unspecified present, with generic fighters engaged in urban civil war. It was not the silliest production one had ever seen, although the staging of the great duet "Per le porte del tormento" was cringeworthy. In general the complicated story was as clearly told as it is likely to be, although the decision to portray Sosarme (Senesino's role) as incompetent as well as ineffectual was probably a mistake.

Countertenor Benno Schachtner in the title role sang well and his acting was effective within the director's concept of the role. Soprano Ines Lex sang and acted very well as Sosarme's intended, Elmira (Strada's role), who is at the center of the drama. As also happened last year, she was let down by her costume designer, and if a representative from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) had seen her climbing backwards up a ladder to the top of a structure that was visibly unstable, the show would surely have been closed down. Ki-Hyun Park as King Haliate's advisor and the eventual villain, Altomaro, once again displayed a wide-ranging bass voice entirely appropriate to a role created for Montagnana. The remaining singers were more than adequate. The Handel Festival Orchestra, under their Artistic Director Bernhard Forck, played well; as usual, the presence

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for spa towns where they would spend the summer months. The season for benefits was therefore quite short, spanning only February through May; the earlier a performer's benefit, the better, as audiences would not yet have grown exhausted by the numbers of special opera performances, recitals, and concerts that they could attend nearly every night per week.

Creating an inviting narrative through creative programming and advertising at one's benefit became necessary for performers needing to distinguish themselves from the competition. Most concert benefits in the first decade of the eighteenth century were variety shows featuring a mix of theatrical performers, singers, instrumentalists, dancers, and even acrobats and slapstick actors. It was not until the 1710s that musicians began to organize benefits consisting of only music—and even then, performers prized musical variety. In a 1714 concert for the benefit of Mr. Kenny (a bassoonist) and William Wells (a violinist in the opera orchestra), the two musicians advertised a “Consort of Vocal and Instrumental Musick” of both English and foreign origin, including a “celebrated song” by Handel, a “charming entertainment by a Gentlewoman from Abroad who hath never before exposed her Voice publicly in this Kingdom,” and an “uncommon” piece of music written only for bassoons.² This event capitalized on age-old marketing techniques of advertising new singers, novel ensemble pieces, and renowned names. Whichever celebrated song of Handel's was sung, it is clear that Kenny and Wells expected a performance of Handel's music to garner them a larger audience.

Most benefit concerts advertised between 1710 and 1730 did not feature Handel's music exclusively; usually, the composer was not advertised at all. If Handel's name appeared in ads, only one or two works would be performed—frequently, unnamed cantatas, harpsichord lessons, and “Songs out of the latest operas.” However, in a few cases Handel's works were named specifically, and these provide insight into what both performers and audiences valued by the composer. For example, suites from *Water Music*, (always with a kettle drum played by Benjamin Baker) frequently closed benefits with a dramatic flourish—such performances appear on no fewer than twenty programs from between 1722 and 1742. Other years saw repeat performances of a popular tune in new contexts: in 1736, Richard Leveridge, a prominent bass singer who rose to fame in the 1690s, and John Laguerre, who sang for John Rich's company, performed a “Chancon [*sic*] à Boire, to Musick of Mr. Handel's” on Leveridge's benefit (April 12),³ on a benefit for Mr. Ford (May 4),⁴ on a May 11 benefit for Mr. Wood,⁵ and finally on a benefit for Mr. Pollett on November 22.⁶ This jovial drinking song could have been “Bacchus, God of Mortal Pleasure” based on a tune from *Ottone*,⁷ or possibly the popular “Let the waiter bring clean glasses,” an adaptation of “Il tricerbero umiliato” from *Rinaldo*. Although Handel's music made only brief appearances on most programs, these examples indicate that certain works accrued special appreciation from both audiences and the beneficiaries themselves, as they were adapted for new kinds of performances.

Most benefits of the eighteenth century promoted Handel's music within the company of other works, but a handful of concerts in the 1720s stand out: first, because the advertisements published in London's various newspapers

specified every selection on the program; and second, because the beneficiaries featured Handel's music as the main event. Between 1714 and 1743, advertisements preserve only five such concerts—four of them occurred in the winter and spring of 1729. On March 5, 1729, the contralto Jane Barbier gave a benefit featuring at least seven Handel arias from Royal Academy operas, including *Admeto*, *Siroe*, and *Tolomeo*.⁸ In fact, Barbier had given a similar concert in 1726 in conjunction with a performance of *The Recruiting Officer*, which was one of the earliest advertised benefits to highlight only Handel's music. On the 1726 concert, she sang excerpts from *Rodelinda*, *Giulio Cesare*, *Radamisto*, *Tamerlano*, and *Rinaldo*, all of which were Royal Academy operas except for the last.⁹ However, *Rinaldo*'s “Or la tromba” stands out: as the editors of *Handel Documents* acknowledge, Barbier had revived the title role in *Rinaldo* in the 1710s after Nicolini left London. In 1720, she retired from the stage after gaining “above £5000 by South Sea stock,” and the reasons for her return to the theater a few years later are unknown.¹⁰ The aria's placement on her 1726 benefit would have reminded her audiences of her former glory days of the previous decade when she routinely performed in Italian operas, including those by Handel.

While Barbier's 1726 concert emphasized the height of her career, the explosion of 1729 benefit concerts featuring Handel's music suggests something more significant. By 1729, Handel's music had not been heard on the London stage in nearly a year. The Royal Academy of Music, having fallen apart at the seams in 1728, let go its most prominent Italian singers, who departed for more lucrative—or at least financially stable—jobs on the Continent. By February, however, there was buzz throughout London that a new opera company was in the works, as Handel left for the Continent to recruit more singers for the venture. He was gone for five months. It seems no coincidence that Barbier's March 5 benefit concert in 1729 was the first in a series to feature Handel's music exclusively. Following her, on March 14 Charles Weideman played Handel's music for the 1727 coronation ceremony of George II on his benefit.¹¹ The soprano Ann Turner Robinson followed with a three-act benefit concert of Purcell and Handel on March 26,¹² and in April, both Jean Christian Kytch and Filippo Rochetti¹³ gave benefits in which Handel's music played a large role. Strikingly, few of these beneficiaries—save the instrumentalists—had significant connections with Handel or the Royal Academy. Barbier, a contralto, had not performed for Handel since revivals of *Rinaldo* in the 1710s. Robinson originated roles during the first season of the Royal Academy in 1719-20, but was not invited back; instead she sang for John Rich's company at Drury Lane, alongside the tenor Rochetti. Weideman and Kytch, the two instrumentalists, had more substantial connections to Handel during the 1720s: Weideman was a celebrated flautist at the opera, and Kytch was the Royal Academy's premier oboist.

Kytch's benefit concert, held on April 16, 1729 in Mr. Hickford's Great Room, illuminates how and why these 1729 benefits promoted Handel's music so prominently.¹⁴ This event

8 Advertisement, *Daily Journal*, March 5, 1729, *BCN*. “Mrs Barbier's Songs are, Sparite o Pensieri, Mi Credi In Fedele, Almamia, Se Unsolo, Tiranni Miei Pensier, Latigge ar Dedi Sdegno, Sclarco. With the French Horns, and the Echo in Ptolemy.” I have preserved the original spelling from the advertisement, both here and in the rest of the article.

9 Advertisement, *Daily Courant*, March 26, 1726, *BCN*. “In which Mrs Barbier will perform the following Songs: Dove sei er non e si vago e Bello. Ombra Cara—A New Italian Song A Song with the French Horns. Bella Asteria er horla Tromba—With the Trumpet.”

10 Notice, *Applebee's Original Weekly Journal*, August 6, 1720, *BCN*.

11 Advertisement, *Daily Journal*, March 13, 1729, *BCN*.

12 Advertisement, *Daily Post*, March 26, 1729, *BCN*.

13 Advertisement, *Daily Journal*, April 29, 1729, *BCN*. Rochetti's benefit was held on April 30th.

14 Advertisement, *Daily Post*, April 11, 1729, *BCN*.

2 Advertisement, *Daily Courant*, February 20, 1714, in *Burney Collection Newspapers Online* (hereafter referred to as *BCN*).

3 Advertisement, *London Daily Post and General Advertiser*, April 10, 1736, *BCN*.

4 *Ibid.*, May 1, 1736, *BCN*.

5 *Ibid.*, May 7, 1736, *BCN*.

6 *Ibid.*, November 22, 1736, *BCN*.

7 My thanks to Olive Baldwin and Thelma Wilson for suggesting this at the Handel Institute Conference in November 2015.

resembled variety shows of years' past, with one major difference: all of the music performed by Kytch on the concert (save one aria) was drawn from Handel's Royal Academy operas. Even more importantly, Kytch organized the program with collaborative intentions: while the concert featured him playing "all the Vocal Parts [...] on the Hautboy, and also the little Flute and Bassoon," interspersed between arias were pieces highlighting his illustrious instrumental colleagues at the opera.¹⁵ Pietro Castrucci, a virtuoso violinist and Handel's opera orchestra leader, played a concerto by Corelli; a "Mr. Bach" played solo parts on a concerto grosso by Johann Christoph Pepusch; and two pieces featured *obbligato* French horns ("The French horn song" in *Griselda* and a concerto for French horns by a "Signor Nicolini"). Collaborating in benefits had long been the practice in England, and Kytch was not alone that season: Weideman performed on Ann Turner Robinson's benefit concert, and Filippo Rochetti featured "Handel's" trumpeter John Grano. Such collaborations were likely not altruistic (as extra performers were often paid for their services),¹⁶ but the participation of instrumentalists normally employed by the opera implies that Kytch's concert was also for the benefit of his other colleagues.

Most of the arias performed on Kytch's concert were drawn from five Handel operas: *Tolomeo*, *Alessandro*, *Siroe*, *Radamisto*, and *Rodelinda*. Two—the "French horn song" from *Griselda* (1722) and "No oh Dio" from *Calpurnia* (1724)—were by Giovanni Bononcini. What most of these have in common is their vibrant orchestral scoring, either highlighting *obbligato* instruments, such as flutes in "Fonti amiche" from *Tolomeo*, or the French horns in "Le fere a risvegliar" from *Griselda*. Others are showstoppers for the violins as well as the voice. "Lusinghe più care" (*Alessandro*), "Ch'io mai vi possa" (*Siroe*), and "L'empio rigor" (*Rodelinda*) are textbook examples of how Handel's orchestra possessed as much dramatic weight and melodic importance as the vocal line. It is not hard to imagine these arias, with Kytch playing the vocal melodies on the oboe, as instrumental duets with the illustrious Castrucci on violin. Outside of their original operatic contexts, Handel's arias were no longer employed solely as vehicles for star singers. Instead, the program drew attention to the behind-the-scenes of the opera: the performers of the orchestra pit and the superb accompaniments that Handel composed to feature them. Kytch's benefit concert gave orchestral musicians the chance to show off their skills and abilities without the added distraction of voices—especially the virtuosic superstars that had attracted such notoriety and attention during the previous nine years.

Although no records survive indicating how successful any of the 1729 benefit concerts were, it would not be surprising if audiences had spilled out of the theaters and concert halls and onto the streets of London. That all five of these musicians should give benefit concerts programming Handel's works almost exclusively implies purpose beyond the personal or financial; rather, Handel's music appeared on the concert stage at the moment it was most missed.

— Alison DeSimone (University of Missouri-Kansas City)

¹⁵ The "little flute" is probably a soprano recorder, according to Bruce Haynes. See Haynes, *The Eloquent Oboe: A History of the Hautboy, 1640-1760* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 349.

¹⁶ I have not found evidence that Kytch's performers received any remuneration for playing on his benefit, but it is possible they each received a small stipend, since singers followed a similar model earlier in the century. Another likely scenario is that the instrumentalists would have asked Kytch to play on their benefits, in a kind of reciprocal exchange. Without names, it is hard to track down what other benefits were given this season. Castrucci gave a benefit at Hickford's Rooms on February 25, 1729, although performers are not listed.

CALL FOR PAPERS

AMERICAN HANDEL SOCIETY CONFERENCE 2017

The Biennial Conference of the American Handel Society will take place at **Princeton University** on **April 6-9, 2017**. The Society invites submission of abstracts for papers on any topic connected with Handel's life and music. Abstracts of no more than 500 words may be sent by **October 1, 2016** to the Program Chair, Robert Ketterer at Robert-ketterer@uiowa.edu.

INTERNATIONAL HANDEL RESEARCH PRIZE 2017

In 2017 the *Georg-Friedrich-Händel-Gesellschaft* is to award for the third time the *International Handel Research Prize* to a young scholar who has completed a research project on the life or work of Handel and has presented the results in a formal research document. Research teams also may apply.

The International Handel Research prize is sponsored by the *Foundation of the Saalesparkasse*. It is valued at €2000 and entails the presentation of a paper to be read by the prize-winner at the scholarly conference to be held during the annual *Handel Festival in Halle* (an der Saale), June 6–7, 2017.

Applications may be made by graduates in musicology or related disciplines who have completed their Master's or Doctoral studies (or equivalent research) between 2014 and 2017. Historical-critical editions may also be submitted for the prize. Studies in English or German language are accepted.

Applications should be sent by **February 1, 2017** (postmarked) to:

Georg-Friedrich-Händel-Gesellschaft e.V.
Internationale Vereinigung
Geschäftsstelle
Grosse Nikolaistraße 5
D-06108 Halle (Saale)

The application must include the scholarly work undertaken (in printed and in electronic form) and be accompanied by a brief curriculum vitae and an account of the applicant's career.

The selection of the prize-winner will be made by a panel from the *Foundation of the Saalesparkasse* and the *Georg-Friedrich-Händel-Gesellschaft*. The prize will be presented at the scholarly conference of the *Handel Festival in Halle*, June 2017.

For the PDF file please go to <http://haendel.de/Gesellschaft/haendel-forschungspreis>

and use of the organ and a variety of percussion instruments was regrettable. The performance seemed to me to validate the late Anthony Hicks' comment that "the music of *Sosarme* is of high quality throughout, but its beauties are not always placed in the service of the drama."

Saturday morning, May 28, brought the Annual Membership Meeting of the G. F. Händel Gesellschaft, preceded by the Festvortrag given by Professor Doctor Sabine Volk-Birke on the relationship between Biblical history and English history in Handel's sacred music. I presented greetings from the AHS and issued an invitation to attend AHS Princeton next April. The membership approved a proposal from the Board of Directors to facilitate membership in the sister societies of Göttingen and Karlsruhe. There will be more about this in a future issue of the *Newsletter*, once the details are ironed out.

On Saturday evening there was a concert performance of the pasticcio *Catone* in the Ulrichskirche. Created in 1732, the same year as *Sosarme* and for the same cast, it takes as its starting point Leonardo Leo's *Catone in Utica*, which had been first performed during Carnival in Venice in 1729. Handel truncated the recitatives, transposed some of Leo's arias, and added arias by Vinci, Porpora, Vivaldi, and an unknown composer. Most of the music struck me as too similar in character and too often in major keys – impressive rather than expressive. The exceptions were the aria "È ver che all'amo intorno" with obbligato bassoon (wonderfully played by Anna Flumiani) from Porpora's *Porro*, and the bravura aria that closed the opera, "Vo' solcando un mar crudele" from *Artaserse* by Vinci. Lucia Cirillo sang the latter and the rest of her role as Marzia, Cato's daughter who is in love with Caesar, very well indeed. Sonia Prina, in the title role, is particularly skilled in virtuosic (read: impressive) music and this role played to her strength. The most compelling singer to my mind was the mezzo soprano Kristina Hammarström in the role of Arbace, the Numidian Prince in love with Marzia. The ensemble Auser Musici played well under the direction of Carlo Ipata. The program booklet helpfully identified the sources of the borrowed arias.

On Sunday, May 29, I attended the second of three performances of Handel's 1737 pasticcio *Didone Abbandonata* at the Historic Goethe-Theater in Bad Lauchstädt. This work is based primarily on Leonardo Vinci's 1726 setting of Metastasio's libretto of that title. As with the earlier pasticcios, Handel shortened the recitatives, transposed some of the arias, and added music by other composers, in this case Giacomelli, Vivaldi, and Hasse. On balance Vinci comes across as a more successful dramatic composer than Leo, and *Didone Abbandonata* presents a much better mixture of impressive and expressive music for the singers to work with. Didone's death in the middle of an accompanied recitative is certainly dramatic, although one wondered whether Vinci's original had been shortened for this performance even more than Handel had indicated.

The young singers sang and acted very convincingly. The staging by Yona Kim left too many characters lounging around the stage when they should have departed, but this did not adversely affect the story telling. The soprano Rinnat Moriah was outstanding in the title role, acting with real commitment and singing both dramatically and stylishly; her ability to produce a genuine trill is rarely encountered these days. The two countertenors Kangmin Justin Kim (billed as "Sopranus") and Antonio Giovannini, playing Aeneas and Jarbas respectively, were equally fine. The Lautten Compagny Berlin under the direction of Wolfgang Katschner seemed to play with more of a sense of 18th-century style than on some previous occasions, and the pit was a blissfully percussion-free zone.

The scholarly conference took place on Monday, May 30 and Tuesday, May 31. Unlike in previous years, each day had a different focus. The topic of the first day was "The Myth of Handel as an Enlightenment Figure," and the session included papers by

AHS members Donald Burrows, John Roberts, and me. John's paper, which was not strictly on topic, described his identification of a previously unknown early version of the cantata "Tu fedel? Tu costante?" preserved in a manuscript in the private collection of the harpsichordist and conductor Ton Koopman. The new discovery, which has only the opening recitative and aria in common with the previously known version, was premiered in Amsterdam in April 2016. A recording by the same performers is scheduled for release in September, and it is planned that a supplementary volume of the HHA containing the cantata will appear around the same time.

The topic for the second day of the conference was "The Myth of Handel's Ties to the People?" This was the outgrowth of a multi-year research project based in Halle on the subject of the reception of Handel's music in the Nazi period and in the German Democratic Republic. Juliane Riepe's paper tracing the idea of Handel as a "People's Composer" back to the early 19th century was of particular interest. The papers from both days will be published in the *Händel-Jahrbuch* 2017.

The Handel Festival has in recent years presented an increasing number of Festival Concerts, generally featuring guest singers and instrumentalists from Europe and Great Britain. The Festival Concert on Wednesday, June 1, was exceptional in that it featured a local singer, soprano Romelia Lichtenstein, who is the prima donna of the Halle Opera. Ms. Lichtenstein has sung in Halle for 20 years, during which time she has learned and performed ten principal roles in Handel operas – in addition to performing the standard dramatic soprano repertoire including *Butterfly*, *Norma*, the Marschallin, *Leonora* in *Il Trovatore*, and the title roles in both *Lucia di Lammermoor* and *Lucrezia Borgia*. This season she made her role debuts as Despina and Adriana Lecouvreur, and next season she will add *Tosca* to her repertoire. She was named Kammersängerin by the City of Halle in 2012 and this year she was awarded the Händel-Preis of the City of Halle by the Handel House Foundation – an honor that was richly deserved. The formal presentation took place at the end of this concert, with a *Laudatio* given by Klaus Froboese, long-time Intendant of the Halle Opera.

The program consisted of music by Telemann and Handel, with arias from Telemann's opera *Orpheus* and Handel's *Alcina* being interspersed with instrumental pieces from the same operas as well as Handel's incidental music for *The Alchemist*, all performed by the Handel Festival Orchestra under the direction of Bernhard Forck who also played principal violin. The orchestra acquitted itself with distinction, and Ms. Lichtenstein's singing was outstanding, particularly in *Alcina*'s arias. In a concert setting, where she could remain in one place and communicate directly with the audience and with her fellow musicians, it was clear what a remarkable singer and actress Ms. Lichtenstein is and how confidently she handles the demands of the baroque repertoire. After a program of dramatic and mostly virtuosic arias, the second of her three encores was "Lascia ch'io pianga," eloquently sung with perfect legato and appropriate ornamentation. The concert took place in the Festsaal of the Leopoldina, an elegant new venue for the festival and one that I hope will continue to be used in future years.

Saturday afternoon, June 4, was the occasion for a concert performance of *Acis and Galatea* in its Cannons form at the Ulrichskirche. John Butt and his Glasgow-based Dunedin Consort presented the version, based on the readings of the lost performing score, that they had previously recorded for Linn, and provided a rare opportunity to hear the work sung by five solo voices and played by an instrumental ensemble of the appropriate size and composition. The presence of a bassoon and double bass, both of which seem to have been added to Handel's orchestra at Cannons shortly before the first performance in June 1718, seemed to my ear to work very well, although it is difficult to judge balance in the Ulrichskirche. The inclusion of an organ in a couple of the choruses was inappropriate but unobtrusive.

Most of the soloists were the same as those on the recording. Joanne Lunn, in the role of Galatea, who was new to the cast, sang beautifully and clearly inhabited the role. Nicholas Mulroy, as Acis, has the right sort of pastoral-heroic sound but too often pulls the rhythm about. Matthew Brook imbues Polyphemus with almost the ideal balance of comic and serious elements, although in a semi-staged concert version like this one he needs to be careful not to overdo the former. John Butt has clearly thought through his interpretation with great care, although I think his tempo for the pivotal trio “The Flocks shall leave the Mountains” is too slow. It is, nonetheless, a significant achievement.

One of my teachers often expressed the opinion that intelligible diction and appropriate tempo were the two crucial elements of Handel performance, and I am inclined to believe he was correct. These issues came to mind in connection with Saturday evening’s performance of *Belshazzar* directed by Ottavio Dantone, leading his excellent orchestra, the Accademia Bizantina. Diction is especially important in *Belshazzar* because of the lengthy and important recitative texts, and there were problems here. Thomas Walker was encouraged to illustrate Belshazzar’s impetuous nature by rushing through his recitatives, which made nonsense of some of them. Delphine Galou, as Daniel, sang the recitatives at a reasonable clip, but could not always be clearly understood. Even the RIAS Kammerchor, which normally displays the best English diction of any German choir, seemed to be having an off night.

Tempo is also particularly important in *Belshazzar*, especially in the choruses, because the three groups of protagonists – the Babylonians, the Jews, and the Persians – sing different types of music at different speeds. As Winton Dean memorably pointed out, the Babylonians sing dance-based songs – most often drinking songs – which require a swinging rhythm but not necessarily great speed. The captive Jews, on the other hand, sing slow numbers, mostly in the minor mode, alternating between homophony and “learned” counterpoint. The Persian choruses are something else again: purposeful, heroic but not vainglorious, their rapid passages should always be under control. Most of the tempi were well chosen, although the Persian choruses were occasionally too fast. The main problem occurred at the end of Act III, where almost every tempo was too fast. In the first place, the “Anthem” (as Jennens called it in his draft libretto) consists of music borrowed from an actual Chapel Royal anthem and the presumption should be that Handel wished it to be sung at a tempo appropriate to the anthem. In the second place, “I will magnify thee, O God my King” is sung by Daniel and the choral portions that follow are sung by the Jews, perhaps with the assistance of the victorious Persians. They should maintain an appropriate element of seriousness. This is not a generic oratorio-concluding chorus; it is, like *Belshazzar* as a whole, unusual within Handel’s *oeuvre*.

My other major complaint about the performance had to do with the casting. Rosemary Joshua was superb as Nitocris, fully encompassing the role. Thomas Walker was acceptable as Belshazzar, subject to the caveats expressed above, and Konstantin Wolff delivered a fine performance of Gobrias, even though he was too young for the character. Delphine Galou sang very well as Daniel, but her accented English prevented the crucial words from coming across clearly. In addition, she failed to embody the character of Daniel, a Prophet capable of interpreting the works of God. Daniel must exude an aura of absolute confidence, with perhaps even a hint of zealotry. Handel envisioned the role for Mrs. Cibber, who was first and foremost a great actress. It is a much more difficult role to cast than it seems at first glance.

Arguably the most important role after that of Nitocris is Cyrus, Prince of Persia. He must be believable as a great military leader who has seriously taken up the cause of the Jews and who is magnanimous to the defeated Babylonians in victory. The talented countertenor Valer Sabadus played him as a petulant young man, showing off in his singing in a manner that might be appropriate for Alexander the Great but is inappropriate for Cyrus. Whether

sung by a man or a woman, Cyrus must display the element of *gravitas*. The best Cyrus in my experience has been Catherine Denley; I would relish the opportunity to hear Ulrike Schneider sing the role.

If the Festival is going to continue to schedule only one major oratorio other than *Messiah* each year, then it should be performed at a very high level, as has been the case in the past few years. This includes making sure that the casting is appropriate and that the director understands the musical issues involved. It also means having a second harpsichord available to accompany the recitatives and solos if, as was the case with Maestro Dantone, the conductor is going to spend the vast majority of his time standing in front of the first harpsichord waving his arms; the organ should be reserved for doubling the voices in the choruses and for occasional special effects specified by Handel. This was not a bad performance of *Belshazzar*, but it was not worthy of the Handel Festival.

There were, as always, many concerts and opera performances that I could not manage to attend, several of which were connected with excursions to sites outside of Halle including the Carl-Maria-von-Weber-Theater in Bernburg. There were also special exhibitions, including one about the Foundling Hospital in the Händel Haus and two concerning the Stadtsingechor zu Halle, which celebrates its 900th birthday this year, in the Stadtmuseum Halle and the Wilhelm-Friedemann-Bach-Haus. There was also a lovely traveling exhibition of French and Swiss Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings and sculptures from the Villa Flora in Winterthur, Switzerland presented by the Kunstmuseum Moritzburg.

Next year’s Handel Festival in Halle will take place from May 26 to June 11, 2017. Events will include a new staging of *Jephtha* by the Halle Opera, using Ken Nott’s edition for the HHA. There will also be stagings of the Cannons version of *Acis and Galatea* and *Giustino* at the historic Goethe-Theater in Bad Lauchstädt, and concert performances of *Messiah*, *Deborah*, *Esther*, *Acis, Galatea e Polifemo*, and the pasticcio *Elpidia*. Artists honored with special Festival Concerts will include Ann Hallenberg, Xavier Sabata, Sonia Prina, and Vivica Genaux, and there will be the usual complement of instrumental and chamber music programs. Tickets should be available beginning in December 2016.

— Graydon Beeks

NEWSLETTER OF THE AMERICAN HANDEL SOCIETY

The Newsletter is published three times a year (Spring, Summer, and Winter). The Editor welcomes submissions in the following categories for future issues:

- Short articles (1500-2000 words);
- News of recent Handel-related events, presentations (special lectures or conference papers), and concerts organized and/or performed by members of the Society;
- Reviews of performances and recordings of Handel’s music;
- Information about awards and honors presented to members of the Society;
- News of recent publications;
- Abstracts for dissertations in progress on a Handel-related topic.

Please submit your contributions to the Editor, Minji Kim (minjik@gmail.com)

OBITUARY FOR ALAN CURTIS (1934-2015)



Photograph by Frédéric Almagiva

Alan Curtis, who died suddenly on July 15, 2015 in his adopted city of Florence, Italy was a distinguished conductor, harpsichordist, and musicologist, notable for pursuing all three of these passions simultaneously. That is, his musicology was always directed toward more enlightened performance, and his performances always closely linked to his quest for historical authenticity: of sources and performance practice. He began as a specialist in eighteenth-century keyboard music with two years of study with Gustav Leonhardt, a dissertation on Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck, and path-breaking recordings of François and Louis Couperin as well as J. S. Bach and sons, moving on to the operas of Claudio Monteverdi and Francesco Cavalli, and thence to an exploration of eighteenth-century operas that centered on Handel but also included works by Antonio Vivaldi, Christoph Willibald Gluck, Niccolò Jommelli, Alessandro Scarlatti, and others. Though he focused increasingly on his performing career, retiring from his academic position at University of California, Berkeley in 1994, after 34 years, to live in Italy and conduct full-time, he continued to pursue musicological projects, especially the editions of Monteverdi's operas (*L'incoronazione di Poppea*, 1989— *Il ritorno d'Ulisse*, 2002). Even after they were published, his editions remained in flux, as his own performances continued to experiment with different interpretations of the most problematic passages. (I know this for a fact from the many transatlantic calls we shared over the smallest details in the Monteverdi manuscripts.) The evolution in his thinking about the *Poppea* sources will be evident in a second edition of the score, in press when he died. The fact that he revisited these time-consuming projects is typical of his continued commitment to historical authenticity, to understanding and communicating the meaning of the sources. (His published editions of Venetian operas also included Antonio Cesti's *Il Tito* in 2004.)

As a Handelian, Curtis had many claims to fame. He performed and recorded seventeen of the composer's operas, between 1978 (*Admeto*) and 2013 (*Giove in Argo*). His *Admeto*, in fact, was the first Handel opera to be revived with original instruments, the first to include a theorbo in the continuo group. Even his list of Handel operas displays Curtis's musicological proclivities: an early choice was *Rodrigo* (1999), which represented the first complete performance of the opera since its premiere in 1707. Taking advantage of the most recent research of the time by Winton Dean, Reinhard Strohm, and others, Curtis filled the significant gaps in the original manuscript with newly identified pieces from other works, also including his own

setting of some missing recitative passages. Likewise, his *Giove in Argo* (2013) was also a first: the first recording of Handel's long-lost pasticcio, reconstructed in a new Critical Edition by John Roberts. (It is also worth mentioning that three of the four Vivaldi operas he recorded—*Ercole su'l Termodonte*, *Motezuma*, and *Catone in Utica*—raise the kinds of musicological problems that fascinated Curtis: *Ercole*, long thought lost, was recuperated through the identification of some thirty arias belonging to the work in various European libraries; *Motezuma*, also thought lost, was only identified in 2002 by the musicologist Stefan Voss from an anonymous manuscript in Berlin, and *Catone in Utica*, missing its first act, was, like the other two, reconstructed by Alessandro Ciccolini, who published an edition in collaboration with Curtis.)

For most of his Handel recordings (indeed most of his recordings of vocal music), Curtis utilized the company he had formed in 1978, Il Complesso Barocco. Over a period of nearly forty years, Curtis fashioned an ensemble that reflected his own developing conceptions of the works they performed. Its flexible structure and regular infusion of new blood created a reliable but constantly evolving fount of authentic performance practice. As Curtis wished, the group will continue under the leadership of his longtime companion, the lutenist Pier Luigi Ciapparelli. Curtis was especially appreciated for his work with singers. Indeed, some of today's most renowned singers of Baroque opera learned their trade in Curtis's Il Complesso Barocco: Gloria Banditelli, Sonia Prina, Roberta Invernizzi, Patrizia Ciofi, Vivica Genaux, and many others, perhaps most especially Joyce DiDonato, have repeated acknowledged Curtis's influence on them, especially his ability to communicate his love of the works they performed.

Alan Curtis was a unique figure. His deep and lifelong commitment to the music of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as a keyboardist and musicologist as well as a conductor, distinguishes him from virtually every other figure in the field of Early Music Performance. We will not see his like again.

— Ellen Rosand (Yale University)

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

Plans are underway for Handel at Princeton to be held April 6-9, 2017. Board Member Wendy Heller and her colleagues are promising a splendid event, continuing the tradition of previous conferences, and the Program Committee, chaired by Board Member Robert Ketterer, is anticipating a splendid group of papers. Please see the Call for Papers elsewhere in this issue of the *Newsletter*, and look for updates on the AHS website. And please put the dates on your calendars and plan to attend.

The AHS Board at its next meeting in November will attempt to work out the details of the new Travel Grants to assist students and independent scholars to attend AHS Conferences, beginning with Princeton next spring. Details should be forthcoming in the Winter 2016 issue of the *Newsletter*. The Society is grateful to the members who have already contributed to this fund, and I would remind the membership that the Secretary/Treasurer is always ready to receive gifts designated either for specific projects or for the general support of the Society. Our endowment remains around \$50,000, which is just barely sufficient to underwrite the ongoing activities of the Society. In a time of increasing costs, it would be both desirable and prudent to have a little more room to maneuver.

— Graydon Beeks

OBITUARY FOR ANDREW PORTER (1928-2015)



Photograph by Tannis Toohey

Critic, scholar, librettist, translator, editor, and occasional stage director Andrew Porter died on April 3, 2015 in London at the age of 86. Best known for his work as a music critic, primarily for the *Financial Times* of London and then *The New Yorker* – twenty years in each post – he insisted on placing the music being performed, and often the performances themselves, in context. This context always included history, but could also include society, politics, poetry, architecture, and acoustics. He was always an advocate for the composer – from whatever era – and could be scathing when he felt the edition used or the staging employed adversely affected the composer’s work. His prose combined clarity and elegance, reflecting his study of English at Oxford. The bulk of his *New Yorker* reviews were published in five volumes and make instructive and often inspiring reading.

Porter’s other contributions to the world of music were equally significant. His discovery in the library of the Paris Opera of a substantial amount of music that Giuseppe Verdi had written for the opera *Don Carlos* and then deleted after the final dress rehearsal led to a reevaluation of the work. The music, which had been presumed lost, was published in the critical edition of 1974 and has been performed and recorded. A strong advocate for performing opera in the vernacular, he produced singing translations of many standard works, including the entire Wagner’s *Der Ring des Nibelungen* used by English National Opera and heard in the classic recording conducted by Reginald Goodall. He also acquired practical experience as a

stage director, notably with Verdi’s *La Forza del Destino* in Seattle, WA, and provided the librettos for Bright Sheng’s *The Song of Majnun* (1992) and John Eaton’s *The Tempest* (1985).

Trained as an organist in his native Cape Town, South Africa, and as an organ scholar at Oxford, Porter had a deep understanding of Baroque music and a special interest in Handel. His article on *Rodelinda* for *Opera News* in December 2004 places the opera in the context of its time and also of the “Handel Opera Revival” of the twentieth century – both before and after World War II. It also gives a good summary of his feelings about the composer: “There are some today who think that we Handel champions have gone too far in proclaiming Handel’s dramatic genius. I can’t agree. *Rodelinda* is one of the finest manifestations of Handel’s constructing not aria by separate aria but in terms of scenes, acts and the whole developing drama.”

Porter directed the American premiere of *Tamerlano* in Bloomington, IN in 1985 and concert stagings of *Orlando* and *Semele* at Carnegie Hall in 1984 and 1985, respectively. Arguably his most important contribution to the reception of Handel’s music in America came in the 1980s and 90s, when he regularly attended and participated in the Maryland Handel Festivals. More importantly, he also reviewed them for *The New Yorker*, giving added visibility to the latest Handel scholarship and the performances of the oratorios. A longtime supporter of *The American Handel Society* and a good friend to many of its members, Porter delivered the Howard Serwer Memorial Lecture at Princeton in 2007. A survey of Handel opera productions he had experienced, it provided the opportunity for him to revisit many of the issues he had focused on throughout his career.

— Graydon Beeks

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

- Burrows, Donald. “Handel, Walsh, and the Publication of *Messiah*.” *Music and Letters* 97/2 (2016): 221-248.
- King, Richard G. “Who does what? On the roles of the violoncello and double bass in the performance of Handel’s recitatives.” *Early Music* 44/1 (2016): 45-58.
- McGeary, Thomas. “Handel in Rome: the homosexual context reconsidered.” *Early Music* 44/1 (2016): 59-75.
- Pont, Graham. “Some questions concerning Handel’s early London copyists.” *Early Music* 44/2 (2016): 289-305.

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