

NEWSLETTER of The American Handel Society

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HASHTAGS AND HANDEL: A REVIEW OF *ACIS AND GALATEA* BY THE HAYMARKET OPERA COMPANY

Regina Compton



Tenor Michael St. Peter as Acis. Photo: Anna Cillan

The Haymarket Opera Company in Chicago celebrated the opening of their tenth season on October 30, 2020 with a production of *Acis and Galatea* (1718). Haymarket presented the production at a “Streaming Premiere and Virtual Party” hosted on their website via an embedded YouTube video.¹ It is not easy to appreciate Handel (or most art music) from the glow of a screen. Alex Ross recently bemoaned streamed concerts as “lack[ing] the psychic imprint of the real, the aura of shared experience: the moment they are done, they tend to evaporate from memory.”² Happily, *Acis and Galatea* felt “real”; the production brought together listeners for a memorable event that makes clear the possibility of online performance.

¹ <https://www.haymarketopera.org/acis-live>. Haymarket advertises that only ticket holders can access the performance for ten days after the premiere. At the time of this review, however, the public-facing website continues to display the YouTube video without access restrictions; anyone can enjoy it on demand for the time being.

² Alex Ross, “What does it mean to ‘reimagine’ an orchestra season?,” *The New Yorker*, November 30, 2020, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/12/07/what-does-it-mean-to-reimagine-an-orchestra-season>.

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2021 AMERICAN HANDEL SOCIETY CONFERENCE

The 2021 American Handel Society Conference will be held March 11 through March 14, 2021. The event will be entirely virtual and will be hosted by Indiana University Bloomington. Dr. Berta Joncus will deliver the Howard Serwer Memorial Lecture on Thursday, March 11, and the conference will include eleven papers and a harpsichord lecture/recital. This year’s program will feature a performance of Handel’s opera *Serse* on Friday, March 12, and a Baroque Orchestra Concert by IU’s Historical Performance Institute on Saturday, March 13. Detailed information about registration and access to the event will soon be available on the AHS website, <https://americanhandelsociety.org/events> and the IU conference website, <https://music.indiana.edu/news-events/events/index.html>.

PRELIMINARY SCHEDULE

The schedule is in EST. Daylight saving time in the US starts on March 14, 2021, and in Europe two weeks later.

THURSDAY, MARCH 11, 2021

3:00 pm Opening Remarks and Howard Serwer Memorial Lecture:

Berta Joncus, “Posterity vs Celebrity: Handel Studies and the 21st Century”

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The evening began with live (as opposed to pre-recorded) introductions from the homes of Craig Trompeter (Music Director), who spoke against the backdrop of a vibrant red harpsichord, and Chase Hopkins (General Director and Creative Producer), who offered a more intimate backdrop of books and figurines on a crowded shelf. Subsequently, ticket holders communally watched a pre-recorded video production of *Acis and Galatea*; during the performance, viewers could write comments in the live YouTube chat—an interactive feature that greatly shaped the concert dynamic, as I describe in this review. Finally, the performers and key staff members appeared on the (now familiar) Brady-Bunch-style teleconference grid to answer questions from listeners.

The soloists emerged as largely compelling, expert performers. Kimberly Jones (Galatea) gave a captivating performance: she displayed effortless technique, such as her execution of wide leaps in “As when the dove laments her love,” and she deployed engaging facial expressions that helped to illuminate the meaning of the text (even when her pronunciation sometimes obscured it). Michael St. Peter (Acis) was a vocal delight. With a sparkling voice, he gracefully navigated registral shifts and leaps, as in “Love in her eyes sits playing.” St. Peter suffered occasionally from late entrances, and he missed opportunities for *messa di voce* (notably in his first aria “Where shall I seek the charming fair?”), but he sang with stirring expressivity in the trio “The flocks shall leave the mountains” and his final *recitativo accompagnato*. David Govertsen (Polyphemus) captured the grisly lustfulness of his character. Govertsen showcased his earthshaking low notes in “O ruddier than the cherry” and its preceding recitative, and he employed subtle facial expressions throughout (including cynical, well-timed grins). He might have benefited from more on-stage movement, however: his pine-tree-like stance, for example, contrasted with Jones’s active gestures in the recitative with Galatea and Polyphemus. Kaitlin Foley (Damon) brought to life the pastoral essence of *Acis and Galatea*. Her sugary voice sparkled like rippling water, and her effortless melismas earned her the hashtag “#onetakewonder” in the YouTube chat (to which Foley replied: “awwwwww *blusssshhh*”).

The Haymarket orchestra, under the direction of Trompeter, comprises some of the highest caliber musicians in Chicago; it is not surprising that they achieved a precisely executed, exciting performance

of *Acis and Galatea*. The wind players gave outstanding performances, in particular. Anne Bach (Oboe I) and Erica Anderson (Oboe II) emerged as notable soloists without overwhelming the rest of the orchestra: they easefully tackled the technical parts, such as the dizzying lines in the Overture, but mostly they added touches of color to the full ensemble, such as lending timbral lightness to Polyphemus’s “Cease to beauty to be suing.” In addition, Lisette Kielson (Recorder I) flawlessly captured the near-continuous bird song in “Hush, ye pretty warbling quire,” inspiring soprano Foley to comment in the live chat: “Gosh I love those recorders.”

The Haymarket production also welcomed a dedicated chorus, which made possible some of the outstanding moments of the evening. The chorus worked together as a single organism, rather than a patchwork of five competing soloists. They movingly performed “Mourn, all ye muses”—a lamentation on the death of Acis—and they artfully navigated the quick succession of contrasting sections in “Wretched lovers!”: a wilting imitative passage, a counterpoint over a *moto perpetuo* bass, and an articulate staccato section.

The listener experience of *Acis and Galatea* resembles a typical one in 2020, when in-person performance has been largely shut down since March. I have attended numerous online concerts this year, and, if I may oversimplify, I see two broad categories of scheduled (as opposed to on-demand) events: (1) live-streaming concerts, wherein performers broadcast a live performance using whatever means available—however scrappy—and (2) “watch parties,” wherein a pre-recorded performance streams at a predetermined time. Live-streaming events range widely in production quality and technical support. Some performers live-stream concerts from their living rooms via platforms such as Facebook, Zoom, or YouTube; examples include the “Lockdown Oboe Solo Concerts” with Katherine Needleman, the newly launched Sugar Hill Salon series, and the diverse, one-off live concerts hosted by Groupmuse.³ Conversely, some well-resourced organizations have made use of their robust technical arsenals: for example, Houston Symphony, Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra, and Berlin Philharmonic have been able

³ Katherine Needleman (Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, Principal Oboe) ran a solo concert series on Friday evenings during the early months of quarantine: <http://katherineneedleman.com/lockdown-oboe-solo-concerts>. Sugar Hill Salon organizes virtual living-room concerts to “support, uplift, and connect musicians and composers of color”: <https://www.facebook.com/SugarHillSalonChamberMusic/>. A platform for organizing in-person recitals in intimate settings, Groupmuse currently curates online chamber-music concerts “in the age of social distancing”: <https://www.groupmuse.com/>.

to offer polished live-streaming events, without the headaches of wifi flickers and audio-engineering imperfections. Watch parties generally showcase a pre-recorded professional-quality production: for example, “This Week from Guarneri Hall” offers a schedule of streaming premieres of pre-recorded works, and, in early 2020, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra arranged watch parties of archive recordings (though these organized events seem to have been supplanted by CSOtv).⁴

Like other such events, the Haymarket watch party featured a beautifully wrought production. The company, however, did not recycle an existing recording as other watch parties sometimes do, but rather, specifically produced *Acis and Galatea* for their online event. COVID-19 restrictions slightly shaped the production: string and keyboard players wore masks, and the wind players performed behind a plexiglass barrier. But overall, health and safety guidelines did not noticeably affect the sensibility of the production. Indeed, the singers (albeit socially distanced) could *sing* in a performance space—a feat achieved with help from Kait Samuels, a Covid compliance officer, who insured health standards during a three-day period of filming. Further, Haymarket’s *Acis and Galatea* demonstrated a genuine multidisciplinary effort. Haymarket commissioned Chicago-based artist Zuleyka V. Benitez to paint baroque-inspired backdrops, brought to life on towering LED screens. Haymarket also partnered with Resolution Studios, a Chicago production studio, which provided an outstanding physical space, equipment, and staff. Overall, the recording of *Acis and Galatea* succeeded in crafting a delightful viewer experience. I found just one issue: the edited footage removed all physical transitions (i.e., singers walking on and off the stage). Regrettably, these abrupt, overly efficient cuts—however justifiable—reinforced the disheartening reality that today audiences generally do not have access to in-person theater.

Fortunately, Haymarket made some effort to add touches of the face-to-face theater experience. Many Covid-time concerts attempt to foster an element of live theater and real-time audience engagement (e.g., Groupmuses typically begin with audience-facilitated Zoom breakout sessions).

⁴ The Guarneri Hall series features pre-recorded content, but partners with Groupmuse to enable audience engagement and conversation: <https://guarnerihall.org/events/>. CSOtv gives subscribers access to a rich archive of Chicago Symphony Orchestra concerts; prior to its launch, CSO hosted several watch parties via YouTube and Facebook, such as the “Verdi Requiem Watch Party”: <https://order.cso.org/11186/11188>.

Haymarket cultivated a communal experience with a Q&A among performers, staff, and listeners but, perhaps more critically, enabled YouTube comments. A public chat feature is not unusual during a virtual concert. However, the Haymarket performers themselves attended the streaming event. Thus, passive viewers could enjoy the meta-theatrical experience of the performers commenting on their own pre-recorded performance as it unfolded in real time. The performers directed celebratory comments at each other, and they also gave amusing real-time program notes: the chatty soprano Foley (already cited above) remarked “Oh yeah, ‘death,’ we all know what that means” in the opening of “Love in her eyes sits playing” (*Acis*), and Mallory Harding, a chorus mezzo-soprano, noted “I love the contrast here with the low voice and high recorder” in “O ruddier than the cherry” (*Polyphemus*).

The YouTube chat functionality memorializes audience experience as has never been done. I am reminded of handwritten comments in wordbooks from the eighteenth century. For instance, in a surviving wordbook from a 1749 performance of Handel’s *Solomon*, one listener—who perhaps looks forward to pithy YouTube comments—described “With thee th’unshelter’d moor I’d tread” as “*vastly pretty*.”⁵ Much more complete, the YouTube chat function gives a precise timeline of listener feedback: written, user-linked comments correlated with an exact moment in the performance. One can imagine how such documentation could herald thought-provoking studies in Covid-era Handel reception history.

The Haymarket Opera Company continues its virtual season with productions of *Apollo e Dafne* (March 5–14, 2021) and *Orlando* (June 2021). *Acis and Galatea*, *Apollo e Dafne*, and *Orlando* form a “Handelian Triptych” to celebrate the historically Handel-centric programming of the Chicago Haymarket Opera Company. Like *Acis and Galatea*, *Apollo e Dafne* and *Orlando* will feature a brilliant cast, and Resolution Studios will again partner with Haymarket to procure high-definition films. I recommend attending the scheduled watch parties or purchasing a ticket and watching the productions on your own time. You may find yourself honoring Handel with emojis or coining a new hashtag.

⁵ Hans Dieter Clausen, preface to *Solomon, Hallischen Händel-Ausgabe* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2014), xiii.

FRIDAY, MARCH 12, 2021

- 12:00 pm–1:30 pm **Panel 1: Performance Histories, Performance Practices**
- Luke Howard, “Boston, Birmingham, and the Reception of Robert Franz’s Edition of *Messiah*”
- Beverly Jerold, “The Musician’s Art and Oratory”
- Joseph Lockwood, “Handel’s *Messiah* in New York City, 1770”

Coffee break

- 2:00 pm–2:45 pm Harpsichord Lecture/Recital:
- Jonathan Salamon, “Handel’s ‘Vo’ far guerra’: Schematic Simplicity, Dextrous Complexity”
- 5:00 pm *Serse* (on demand streaming; details TBA)

SATURDAY, MARCH 13, 2021

- 12:00 pm–1:30 pm **Panel 2: Intellectual and Cultural Contexts of Handelian Operas and Oratorios**
- Miguel Arango Calle, “Landscape and Colonialism in Handel’s and Haym’s *Giulio Cesare in Egitto*”
- Mark Risinger, “Messengers and Musicians: The Literary Treatment, Dramatic Function, and Musical Treatment of Handel’s Oratorios”
- Minji Kim, “From Milton to Hamilton and Handel: Total Eclipse, Judgment, and Enharmonicism in *Samson*”

Coffee break

- 1:45 pm–2:30 pm Roundtable: Handel Studies in the Age of Covid-19
- 2:45 pm–3:30 pm Bruce Brown, “The *gargarismi* of Lazzaro Paoli: Singing, Pharmacology, and Castration in Eighteenth-Century Tuscany”
- 4:15 pm Board Meeting
- 8:00 pm IU, Historical Performance Institute, Baroque Orchestra Concert (repertory TBA, livestream)

SUNDAY, MARCH 14, 2021

- 12:00 pm–1:00 pm **Panel 3: Representing Women on the Operatic Stage**
- Regina Compton, “Experiencing Motherhood: The Significance of the Replacement Aria ‘Ah perché’ in the First Revival of *Rodelinda* (December 1725)”
- Paula Maust, “The Italian Elephants and Pigs in Handel’s London Operas”

Coffee break

- 1:15 pm–2:15 pm **Panel 4: Off the Record: Recovering the Traces of Music Makers and Music Making**
- Alison C. DeSimone, “‘Not Found upon the Record’: Female Musical Entrepreneurship in the Eighteenth Century”
- Graydon Beeks, “Some overtures to be plaied before the first lesson”
- 2:30 pm Business Meeting

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

At its November meeting the Board of Directors approved the program for the upcoming AHS Conference, which you can read about elsewhere in this issue of the *Newsletter*. This will be the Society's first virtual conference and it promises to be an event not to be missed. The Program and Local Arrangements Committees have assembled an appealing combination of papers, lectures, and concerts. There will be no registration fee charged for this event, but registration will be required for security reasons; details will be available on the AHS website.

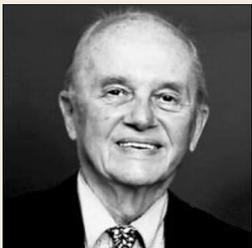
The AHS Board also approved the development of a new membership management program, which will make it easier to process payments and track membership status online. The Board also approved the development of a new and less-confusing structure for membership dues. The hope is to have both innovations in place by the beginning of 2022.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone who responded to my appeal for end-of-year donations to the Society. The response was very generous and will greatly help to support the Society's ongoing activities. Let me remind everyone that the AHS is happy to receive donations at any time. On behalf of the Secretary/Treasurer I would also like to remind everyone that membership in the AHS is on a calendar year basis, which means that membership dues for 2021 will be solicited as of January 1, 2021. Payment can be made by credit card on the AHS website through PayPal or by check mailed to the Secretary/Treasurer. Detailed information may be found on the Membership Form available on the website or in every issue of the *Newsletter*.

— Graydon Beeks

IN MEMORIAM

Joseph Peter Spang III, 1934-2020



A long-time member and friend of the Society. His obituary is published in <https://www.legacy.com/obituaries/bostonglobe/obituary.aspx?n=joseph-peter-spang&pid=196195095>.

CALL FOR PAPERS: 2021 HANDEL INSTITUTE CONFERENCE

The theme of this conference is prompted by the tercentenary of the Royal Academy opera *Muzio Scevola*, composed jointly by Amadei, Bononcini and Handel. The aim is to focus on the relationships between Handel, other composers and his audiences.

In Germany, Italy and Britain Handel drew inspiration from a wide variety of composers and literary sources, and worked with a diverse range of performers; in his turn he influenced many musicians in his own day and in later generations. How do his works – cantatas, anthems, operas, oratorios, odes, concertos, sonatas, keyboard pieces – compare with those of contemporary composers? What did he learn from them? How did he influence them and his successors?

Handel's music also appealed to a wide variety of audiences – in the public theatres of Hamburg and Venice, in the palazzi of Italian noblemen, in London's theatres, cathedrals and other establishments and, especially after his death, in the British provinces. Handel drew admirers from a broad spectrum of society with a wide range of musical knowledge and experience. What did they expect of him and how did they respond to what he produced?

The conference committee invites proposals for papers on any aspect of the interactions or influences between Handel and his predecessors, contemporaries or successors, or on the impact of his music on fellow-musicians or the public from the eighteenth century to the present day. Proposals on other subjects will also be considered. **Abstracts of up to 300 words** for papers lasting not more than thirty minutes should be sent to Professor Matthew Gardner (matthew.gardner@uni-tuebingen.de) by **March 31, 2021**. The conference will be held at The Foundling Museum in London on November 20–21, 2021.

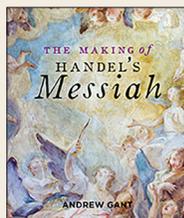
MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

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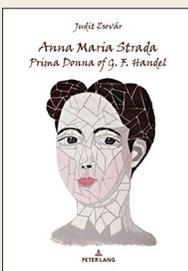
Clark, Lorna J. "Charles Burney at Oxford: the music collection at Christ Church." *Musical Times* 161/1952 (Autumn 2020): 73–84.

Gant, Andrew. *The Making of Handel's Messiah*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2020.



Jerold, Beverly. "A 1760 dream for better performance standards." *Musical Times* 161/1952 (Autumn 2020): 85–100.

Zazzo, Lawrence. "'Troppo audace': Ambition and moderation in Handel's bilingual revival of *L'Allegro, Il Penseroso, ed Il Moderato*." *Eighteenth-Century Music* 17/2 (2020): 215–242. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1478570620000251>



Zsovár, Judit. *Anna Maria Strada, Prima Donna of G. F. Handel*. Berlin: Peter Lang, 2020.

SPECIAL OFFER

The American Handel Society is offering back issues of the Newsletter for FREE (plus the cost of shipping) going back to the first year 1986 to one year before the current issue. To order, please contact the Editor.

UPCOMING EVENTS

2021 American Handel Society Conference

Online, hosted by Indiana University Bloomington
March 11–14, 2021

<https://americanhandelsociety.org/events>

International Academic Conference, Halle (Saale)

"Redemption and the Modern Age—Handel's *Messiah* in the 19th to 21st Century"

Händel-Haus

May 31–June 2, 2021

<https://haendelhaus.de/en/hfs/homepage>

2021 Handel Festival, Halle (Saale)

"Heroes and Redeemers"

May 28–June 12, 2021

<https://haendelhaus.de/en/hfs/homepage>

2021 Handel Institute Conference

"Handel: Interactions and Influences"

November 20–21, 2021

The Foundling Museum, London

<https://handelinstitute.org/conferences/>

The American Handel Society

School of Music, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742
Telephone: (909) 607-3568 Email: americanhandelsociety@gmail.com
<https://www.americanhandelsociety.org>

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

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Life	500	400	450
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Friends of the Handel Institute, London*			
Regular	30	20	-
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
Triple Membership – Georg-Friedrich-Händel-Gesellschaft / Göttinger-Händel-Gesellschaft / Händel-Gesellschaft Karlsruhe			
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
TOTAL REMITTANCE			

* 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 THE AMERICAN HANDEL SOCIETY and mail them to Marjorie Pomeroy Kelly, Secretary/Treasurer, THE 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 June 1.

The American Handel Society

100 Brookside Drive Unit B
Andover, MA 01810

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