

# NEWSLETTER

of

## The American Handel Society

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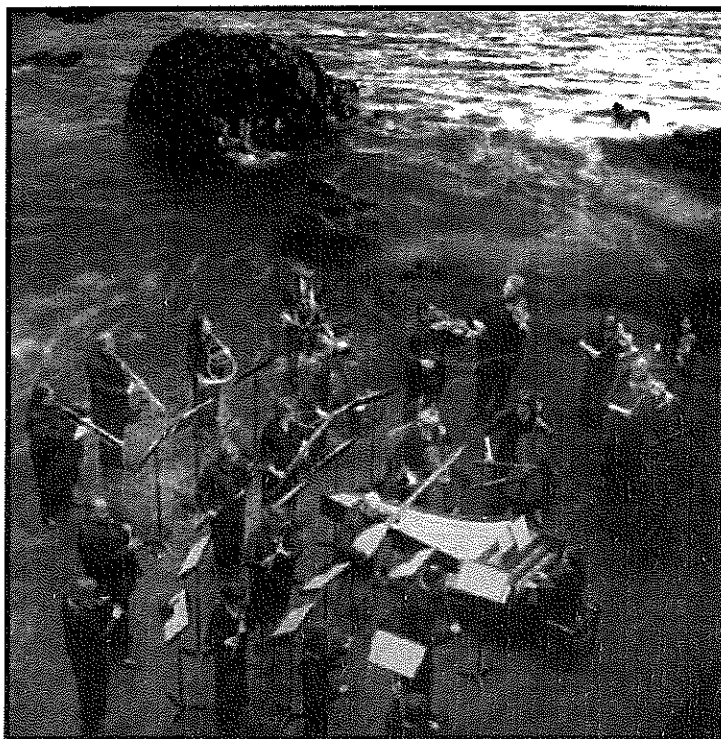
Spring/Summer 2008

### REPORT FROM HALLE 2008

The 2008 Handel Festival in Halle was as successful as any in recent memory. The overall theme was "Spiritual Music in a Secular Sphere, from *La Resurrezione* to *Messiah*" and this was reflected in the repertory performed. The Opening Ceremony featured the presentation of the Handel Prize of the City of Halle to Christopher Hogwood in recognition of his outstanding contributions to Handel performance and scholarship. The Festival Concert that followed featured a performance of the Dettingen Te Deum by the Handel Festival Chorus of the Händel-Haus Halle and the Handel Festival Orchestra drawn from the Staatskapelle Halle under the direction of Martin Haselböck. The performance by the chorus, orchestra and soloists was excellent, with the trumpet playing being especially distinguished, and was clearly the result of careful rehearsal. The decision to include a baroque guitar in the proceedings was unfortunate.

On Friday night I elected to attend the premiere of *Belshazzar* at the Opera House instead of the performance of *Messiah* under the direction of Howard Arman in the Marktkirche. I found Philippe Calvario's staging to be, for the most part, convincing, with the usual gratuitous sex and violence limited to the orgy scenes. The disposition of the chorus was exemplary, and no scene was delayed because of its entrances and exits. The opera house chorus sang better than I have ever heard them, despite being divided into smaller units to personify the Persians, Babylonians and Israelites, and the Festival Orchestra played very well for Maestro Haselböck. Among the soloists Romilia Lichtenstein was outstanding as Nitocris, notwithstanding her unintelligible English. She was vocally secure from her first entrance and only occasionally fell back into what must have been her interpretation of Norma from earlier in the season. The male soloists were also strong, and the

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*Tempesta di Mare, one of the groups performing at the Centre College Handel Festival.*

### ORLANDO CHICAGO OPERA THEATER JUNE 2008

The events of Handel's *Orlando*—I wouldn't have said that they constitute a plot exactly—are the eighteenth century equivalent of a summer movie. The superhero Orlando, busy defeating enemies and rescuing princesses, does not notice that his own princess Angelica has fallen in love with the young and beautiful Saracen Medoro and is planning to run off with him to her native Cathay. When this fact is brought home to him late in the second act, he goes mad, tries to kill everyone involved, and then comes to his senses to renounce passion, forgive the lovers, and embrace glory. Stepping periodically into the fray, and shaping the fates of all the characters, is the magus

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## HANDEL CALENDAR

The American Handel Society welcomes news or information about events of interest to Handelians. If possible, please include address, telephone number and URL where readers may obtain details. Announcements concerning Handel events from around the world are available by logging onto <http://gfhandel.org/>

### RADAMISTO AT SANTA FE OPERA

Santa Fe Opera's first *Radamisto*, a co-production with English National Opera, was greeted with generally rapturous response from critics and audiences alike. The new production is directed by David Alden with scenic and costume designs by Gideon Davey. Based on the version of December 1720 as revised for the late-arriving Senesino in the title role with Margherita Durastanti moving to the role of his wife Zenobia, Alden's staging told the story clearly enough without really illuminating it in any way. Particularly puzzling was the lack of focus on the character of Tigrane, who is the only person onstage who actually makes decisions and takes actions that affect the plot. And surely some attempt could have been made to instill a little subtlety in the character of the evil Tiridate. Although free of the gratuitous violence that one has seen in other Alden productions, there were simply too many characters who failed to exit when they should have and remained onstage to upstage the important action downstage. Were Polissena and Tiridate really taking laudanum during Zenobia and Radamisto's emotional reunion? Davey's sets and costumes, perhaps inspired by Victorian curio cabinets, functioned efficiently but were at the same time puzzling. Why were the smooth surfaces of the floor and certain walls only incompletely polished? Why was Tigrane dressed as what one critic described as "an Armenian businessman?" I suspect it was all too subtle for this Handelian.

Musically things were in the experienced hands of Harry Bicket, who got his modern-instrument orchestra to play with a commendable approximation of period style. His tempi were mostly sensible, with only a few moments that seemed rushed. The decision to compress the action from three acts to two was predictably regrettable, spoiling as it does Handel's carefully considered proportions and necessitating

undesirable cuts. In particular, Kevin Murphy as Farasmane was deprived of his one aria, which he would have sung very well and which was the least he deserved in return for being dragged around in chains for most of the evening.

At the performance I saw the singing was generally excellent. David Daniels in the title role proved once again what a commanding performer he is in Senesino's roles. Laura Claycomb as Polissena seemed uncomfortable in the role and someone should tell her that she need not display her highest notes in every cadenza. Luca Pisaroni was a convincingly villainous Tiridate, singing his big numbers with style and a gleaming bass voice. Heidi Stober sang the underdeveloped Tigrane with great skill. Soprano Debra Domanski gave a distinguished performance as Zenobia, singing and acting with complete confidence. In a rare example of authentic 18<sup>th</sup>-century audience performance practice, she was applauded during the closing ritornello of one aria as she exited the stage.

Over the past twenty years Handel operas have been staged in Santa Fe at roughly four-year intervals: *Ariodante* (1987), *Xerxes* (1993), *Semele* (1997), *Agrippina* (2004), and now *Radamisto* (2008). Let us hope that the new administration of the opera continues this policy – or even expands it. There are few places more pleasant to experience opera than Santa Fe, and all Handelians should hope for more excuses to do so.

— Graydon Beeks

### SPECIAL OFFERS FROM THE AMERICAN HANDEL SOCIETY

The American Handel Society is offering sets of back issues of the *Newsletter* for the price of \$10 per year (three issues each), going back to the first year, 1986. All volumes are available, but some numbers are in short supply. We reserve the right to supply photocopies of individual numbers where necessary. In addition, the AHS has a limited number of copies of *Handel and the Harris Circle* at the price of \$7. This attractive and important booklet, written by Rosemary Dunhill, provides a useful introduction to the rich Harris family archive, recently deposited at the Hampshire Record Office in Winchester and discussed by Donald Burrows in the December 1996 issue of the *Newsletter*. For further details, contact the *Newsletter* Editor.

young countertenor David DQ Lee who sang Daniel displayed a certain wildness in both his countenance and vocal production that was entirely fitting.

Saturday, following the Festival Lecture by Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Sandberger from Lübeck and the Annual Membership Meeting, there was a rare opportunity to hear the two oratorios originally commissioned by Cardinal Ottoboni and the Marchese Ruspoli for Easter 1708 – Alessandro Scarlatti's *La Colpa, il Pentimento e la Grazia* and Handel's *La Resurrezione*. Both performances were compromised by the cavernous acoustic of the Dom, but the Scarlatti, which depends on very subtle musical effects in the string orchestra, was particularly affected. So far as one could tell the performance by La Stagione Frankfurt under the direction of Michael Schneider was excellent, with the three soloists – sopranos Roberta Invernizzi and Gabriele Hierdeis and alto Kai Wessel – doing their best to project Ottoboni's awkward libretto. *La Resurrezione* fared rather better, presumably because Handel paints his effects with a broader stroke, and again Michael Schneider and his ensemble did sterling work. Among the soloists it was particularly enjoyable to hear Halle favorites Martina Rüping and Annette Markert as Maddalena and Cleofe, and they received stellar support from Gabriele Hierdeis, Markus Schäfer and Tyler Duncan.

The Sunday morning Festival Church Service in the Marktkirche featured music by Wilhelm Friedemann Bach, who served as organist there from 1746 to 1764. The cantata *Lobet Gott, unsern Herrn Zebaoth* displayed many features reminiscent of the music of J.S. Bach, including technical demands that were just beyond the capabilities of the Marktkantorei. The Staatskapelle played well under the direction of the current organist Iréné Peyrot.

Sunday afternoon brought the truly outstanding event of the Festival, a semi-staged performance of *Samson* by the Choir of North German Radio and the Festival Orchestra of the Göttingen Handel Festival under the direction of Nicholas McGegan. Both were outstanding, as were the soloists, especially Thomas Cooley as Samson and Wolf Matthias Friedrich as Harapha. Sophie Daneman sang well as Dalila but much of her overtly flirtatious acting seemed curious since its object, Samson, is blind. William Berger and Franziska Gottwald were convincing as Manoa and Micah. It was a particular pleasure to hear the work performed by an orchestra which included only those

instruments likely to have been employed by the composer.

Sunday evening I saw the final performance of Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* given by the Cantus Thuringia and Capella Thuringia at the Goethe Theater in Bad Lauchstädt. The staging and choreography by Margit Legler featured baroque gestures and dance, which were generally appropriate and well done. The decision to supply music mentioned in the libretto but missing from Purcell's surviving scores of the opera was mostly successful; the decision to add enough additional music to expand the work into two acts was less so. The overall impression was of a high-level student production done on a tight budget, and I was happy to have seen it. I hope I may be excused for singling out for special praise the Belinda of Margaret Hunter, a friend and former student currently pursuing a career in Germany.

The Conference, which took place on Monday and Tuesday, adopted the same theme as the Festival. Topics ranged from the nature of oratorio performances in Italy during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries to their performance history throughout Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Papers were presented by AHS members Wolfgang Hirschmann, John Roberts, Donald Burrows, Annette Landgraf and myself, with John Roberts' presentation on "*Messiah* as Christian Narrative" being an outgrowth of the discussions at the AHS Conference in Princeton last year.

Martin Haselböck gave a special organ recital in the Marktkirche early on Tuesday evening featuring the first modern performance of a Chorale Fantasia on *Wo Gott der Herr nicht bei uns hält*, BWV 1128, by the young Johann Sebastian Bach. The work had previously been known only through its incipit (BWV Anhang II 71). It is contained in a manuscript deriving from the estate of the Bach scholar Wilhelm Rust (1822-1892) which was offered for sale in Leipzig in March 2008 and purchased by the Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Sachsen-Anhalt, Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg. It was identified by Michael Pacholke and Stephan Blaut, both members of the Editorial Staff of the Hallische Händel Ausgabe, who have edited it for publication by Beeskow. The program for the recital was carefully chosen to illustrate how similar the style of the new work is to previously known early works by Handel's great contemporary.

Tuesday night's concert in the Ulrichskirche featured concertos by Corelli and De Fesch played by The New Dutch Academy led with maximum self-

indulgence by violinist Simon Murphy. On Wednesday in the Franckesche Stiftungen soprano Sandrine Piau sang arias by Vivaldi and Handel, interspersed with instrumental works by the same composers. The Kammerakademie Potsdam under the direction of Andrea Marcon played well, combining German correctness and Italian flair in just about the right proportion. Ms. Piau was remarkable – impressive in the Vivaldi and expressive in the Handel, which seemed appropriate.

On Thursday evening the ensemble Al Ayre Español under the direction of Eduardo López Banzo presented a concert performance of *Rodrigo* in the Georg-Friedrich-Händel-Halle. If the tempi occasionally felt rushed, the overall effect seemed appropriate for this breathless revenge opera. Among the soloists mezzo soprano Mary-Ellen Nesi in the title role and soprano Sharon Rostorf-Zamir as Florinda were outstanding. Max Emmanuel Cencic, billed as an alto, was effective as Fernando, as was soprano Ana Chierichetti at Evanco. Tenor Kobie van Rensburg illustrated his gift for singing rapid roulades, while soprano Maria Bayo seemed vocally out of sorts as Esilena, even as she projected the dramatic side of the role with authority born of long experience.

I left before the *Brookes Passion* on Friday night, which received a positive report from John Roberts, and also missed the revivals of *Ariodante* and Purcell's *King Arthur* from 2007. And, of course, there were numerous chamber music concerts in the concert hall at the Händel-Haus, outdoor concerts and excursions, and organ recitals. As with any large festival, there were more events than one person could attend.

For next year's celebration of the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Handel's death the theme will be "Handel the European." The Festival will take place from June 4-14, 2009 and will feature performances of four operas (*Floridante*, *Serse*, *Ariodante* and *Alcina*) and four oratorios (*Messiah*, *Acis and Galatea*, *Israel in Egypt* and *Belshazzar*), as well as vocal and instrumental chamber music. There will also be acknowledgments of the anniversaries of Haydn and Purcell, plus music by Handel's contemporaries including Telemann. The conference will be expanded to three days (Monday-Wednesday, June 8-10, 2009). Tickets should be available from December 2008, and further information can be found at [www.haendel2009.de](http://www.haendel2009.de).

— Graydon Beeks

## HANDEL FESTIVAL AT CENTRE COLLEGE

The 2009 Handel Festival will be held at Centre College in Danville, Kentucky. The dates will be February 26 – March 1.

There will be three performances: the group Tempesta di Mare will be performing a Handel program on period instruments. Another group, including both members of Tempesta di Mare and local musicians, will perform "L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato" on modern instruments. The two above concerts will be held at the Norton Center for the Arts. Finally, there will be a performance of organ music at the Presbyterian church adjacent to the Centre College campus.

Conference paper panels on Friday and Saturday will feature presentations by Handel scholars from around the world. Wendy Heller is the chair of the program committee (the Call for papers was published in the last Newsletter issue and is posted on the conference website). Papers will deal with various aspects of Handel's life and music, especially connections between Handel and other composers with significant anniversaries in 2009, such as Purcell, Haydn and Mendelssohn.

This year's meeting is of particular importance, since it represents the official American arm of the international celebration of the life and works of composer George Frideric Handel on the occasion of the 250th anniversary of his death.

Further details may be found at the conference website: <http://web.centre.edu/achs2008/>

— Nathan Link  
Centre College

### MEMBERSHIP DUES AND DIRECTORY

Your mailing label for this and subsequent issues indicates the most recent year for which you have paid dues: 08 indicates dues paid for 2008. If the number on your label seems incorrect, please contact AHS Secretary/Treasurer Marjorie Pomeroy.

Zoroastro, the Gandalf of the piece, who encourages Orlando to virtuous heroism and prevents his wilder and more violent excesses from causing any long-lasting damage. Zoroastro also provides the special effects, causing mountains, temples and deities to appear and disappear, hiding people in clouds or carrying them off in flying carts, creating a cave from nothing and later turning it into "a very beautiful temple of Mars," and summoning Jupiter's eagle from heaven to bring a curative potion for Orlando.

It is appropriate, then, that Chicago Opera Theater's offering of this heroic-pastoral mix of medieval epic and Greek-style myth, adapted from the central books of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, should coincide with the appearance in the movie theaters of the C.G.I. rich *Iron Man* and *The Incredible Hulk*. But I approached it with some concern. COT does not have the resources of the big opera houses. Its sets tend to be modest in conception and execution, and I wondered about the wisdom of taking on an opera that so clearly was written to provide expensive spectacle. In addition, COT had offered up an ugly and misconceived *Don Giovanni* earlier this season. (My companion at that production discovered by the first intermission that the experience was much improved by closing one's eyes and just listening to the singers and Jane Glover's wonderful orchestra.) On the other hand, COT's track record with Handel operas has been good over all,<sup>1</sup> and the designers for this *Orlando* were Andrew Hays and Kimm Kovac, who produced a simple but very beautiful setting for COT's *Entführung aus dem Serail* a couple of years ago.

For *Orlando* the results were mixed. The set consisted of architectural units about four feet wide and twenty feet in height. When put together, as they were in the first and last scenes, these units formed the upstage half of an elegant vaulted room in an Italian villa, decorated with rail, double cornice, and a dimly visible fresco in the manner of a Poussin landscape that ran all the way around the room. Broken apart, the units were meant to suggest rooms in the house of Dorinda, the shepherdess (in this production a rustic house maid), the forest, Zoroastro's cavern, or Orlando's fragmented sanity. A series of portraits of the main characters in varying sizes, posted on the walls, monitored the changing relationships. At the

peak of Orlando's obsession and madness, two of the scene units were turned around to form a giant, scary, photorealistic portrait of Angelica. This set was good to look at, and effective enough; but scene changes were sometimes amateurishly clumsy, puzzling in their meaning, and distracting attention from the hard-working singers and their music. Unless you knew what was supposed to be happening, it just looked like a house wall being fragmented in various ways. All sense of pastoral setting or miraculous scene change was lost. Supernatural events were additionally represented by descending light bulbs on wires, a pretty effect, but in no way equal to disappearing mountains, flying carts or the eagle of Jupiter. Given that Zoroastro, like everyone else, was dressed in costumes evoking the period of the Second World War, one would never have known he was supposed to have magical powers over the countryside and the heavens. The magic potion summoned from Jupiter to revive Orlando became just a cup of water from Dorinda's kitchen tap. The most we got in the way of celestial spectacle was large cut-out figure of a blindfolded Cupid, holding a pistol in each of his outstretched hands, that was flown in and out in the final act as an emblem of the old love-as-war theme that the opera addresses. But by and large, all sense that countryside and cosmos were involved in the outcome of events was lost.

The effect of the elimination of the pastoral and divine elements was to highlight the characteristics that the libretto shares with French neoclassical drama and eighteenth-century opera seria, rather than its retro, seventeenth century qualities. The architectural units of the set always made you feel that you were in the confines of a single structure rather than wandering around the forests and mountains. The positive result of this was that, when we were not being distracted by fidgety stage business and awkward scene changes, the production concentrated our attention on the development of the interrelated passions of the individuals who are at the heart of the opera. As molded by Handel's music, *Orlando* turns out to be a coherent psychological drama, as well as an excellent entertainment. This coherence was strongly reinforced by a very high level of acting by most of the cast. Directed by Justin Way, emotions in the music were matched by convincing portrayals of the characters. And because it was a young and (to me) unfamiliar group, the result was that blending of music and drama that can happen in opera when star singers are absent and the audience is allowed get

<sup>1</sup> Previous Handel productions at COT reviewed in this Newsletter were *Semele* (2002), *Agrippina* (2003), and *La Resurrezione* (2005).

involved in the characters and to abandon itself to the dramatic illusion.

If you go to the opera to cry, your moment was probably Medoro's "Verdi allori, sempre unito" in act II, movingly sung by David Trudgen. Of the two countertenors, Trudgen and Tim Mead as Orlando, Trudgen had the stronger voice and in Act I the comparison was notable. But Orlando has quite a lot more to do in the opera, and it became apparent that Mead was in careful control of his role, handling the melismatic passages written for Senesino with skill and clarity, and swelling to thrilling, full throated highs on important emotional notes. Orlando's mad scene at the end of Act II is the dramatic climax of the opera, and Mead's singing and acting abilities combined brought the house down at the end of the act.

The main female object of romantic interest is Angelica, loved successfully by Medoro and the cause of Orlando's madness. Kate Mangiameli's acting was equal to that of her male colleagues and her singing good, if a little harsh in the uppermost ranges. But I found my attention wandering a bit during her arias, and I'm not sure that was entirely Mangiameli's fault. Angelica's solo arias seem to me, even in William Christie's recording,<sup>2</sup> to be the sort of songs one might expect Handel to produce for a distressed prima donna, better in quality than what most of his contemporaries might have written, but not entirely engaging his attention. His real interest seems to have been in the music of the *pastorella* Dorinda, sung with utmost wit and style in this production by Andriana Chuchman. Dorinda's growth in the opera is the lower-class and sometimes comical reflection of Orlando's, starting in a state of confusion about the nature of love and her feelings for Medoro, and by the end rejecting those emotions as more trouble than they are worth. Chuchman was given good scope for comic relief, but she never let it get out of hand and her pain was palpable. The evening belonged most of all to her Dorinda and Mead's Orlando.

Raymond Leppard conducted. His sometimes-slow tempos may have been gauged to accommodate the abilities of his cast, but they had the added virtue of letting us really listen to Handel's music. Lately it has seemed to me that performances of Baroque music are in an awful hurry, whether in order to show off, or because of union rules about overtime, I can't say. But it was a pleasure to be able to enjoy melody and harmony as well as acting and singing.

The interplay between Mead and the pit during the mad scene was brilliant.

It should be obvious that I was won over by this production, but it left me once again pondering the mistrust that modern producers so often have of the supernatural, regal, and militaristic elements that are at the root of most serious drama written before the twentieth century, including eighteenth-century *dramma per musica*. Leaving aside constraints imposed by production budgets, it seems that modern revivals begin from the assumption that the supernatural must be reasoned away. Moreover, all autocracy is tyranny, and imperialism is most definitely out of fashion. Audiences apparently cannot be expected to make the leap of imagination into a world that believed that heaven takes an interest in earth, autocratic rulers can be (or learn to be) enlightened, and conquest is a virtue. Such beliefs are not dead, of course, or even dying in the modern world; it is only that they are taken seriously in venues other than the palaces of high art. But Handel was not Brecht. I wonder if our producers, with their solemn and literal minded deconstructions of what is fundamental to early modern aristocratic drama, might not make their own jobs easier if they took these dramas on their own terms, and trusted their audiences to see for themselves the cracks in the armor of eighteenth-century politesse.

— Robert Ketterer  
The University of Iowa

## HANDEL-L

HANDEL-L is a discussion list open to everybody wishing to discuss the music, life and times of George Frideric Handel and his contemporaries. Subscribers are welcome to initiate or respond to a wide variety of topics. "Lurkers" are welcome to monitor proceedings anonymously.

All Handel enthusiasts, at any level of specialisation, are encouraged to provide reviews and feedback concerning recordings, opera productions, concerts, and literature. HANDEL-L combines this appreciation of Handel's music with comments, short reports, and discussion from scholars, performers, and journalists who maintain a serious interest in the composer and his world: the discussion list is a valuable source for breaking the latest Handel news around the world.

To join HANDEL-L visit <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/handel-l/>

2 Les Artes Florissants, Erato, 1990.

## ORATORIO À LA MODE

In spring 2007, I published a curious calendar from 1732 that wonderfully captured Handel's production of *Esther* in the heat of its triumph.<sup>1</sup> The document, as well as my report, placed the oratorio in the broad context of London's buzzing life. It made palpable that, for the newsroom in May 1732, *Esther* overcame its theatrical milieu to join in visibility the chief political and social events of the day.

Published on May 16, the calendar is also the first printed commentary on *Esther's* reception, predating *See and Seem Blind* by two weeks. This last, written in late May<sup>2</sup> and published on June 8,<sup>3</sup> remains the only description of the oratorio as theatrical craze. I am pleased to pair it with a new source from late June, which further supports and expands this claim.

"*Reflections on some modern Plays*" appeared in the short-lived (and now very rare) periodical *The Comedian, or Philosophical Enquirer*<sup>4</sup> and establishes a new link between the *Esther* craze and Henry Fielding's *The Modern Husband*, also produced in early 1732. I reprint it here for the first time from the copy at Harvard's Houghton Library.

### *Reflections on some modern Plays.*

I Lately payed a Visit to a Yorkshire Gentleman, just come to Town, who told me that several in the Country entertain a Suspicion of the Booksellers presuming to publish bad Plays which were never performed on any Stage, and to print them as acted at the Theatres in *Drury-Lane*, *Lincoln's-Inn-Fields*, &c. with the Names of the Players opposite to the Names of the Characters; and this Art, say'd he, they are [12] supposed to use as an Imposition on their Customers who live at a great Distance from *London*; some of which buy every Play that is acted. I wonder, continues he, why the Managers of the Theatres will suffer themselves to be abused, in such a Manner, by the Chicane of Booksellers, if the Law has any Redress for them.

He was going on in the same invective Strain, taking the Facts for granted, till I interrupted him by asking his Reasons for suspecting the Booksellers guilty of such Frauds.

My Reasons! says he. Can any Man of common Sense (and here he began with a Tone of Indignation and Contempt) read the dramatic Pieces which have been printed within these few Years, such as the Tragedy of

*Timoleon*, *Periander*, *Medea*, the Ballad-Operas of *Sylvia* or the *Country-Burial*, the *Devil to pay*, and the long Catalogue of Rubbish published these last three Winters, under the Denominations of Tragedys, Comedys, Farces, and Ballad-Operas, and suppose the Managers of the Theatres would affront their Audiences with the Representation of such Stuff? Can any one read the comical Incidents in the Tragedys of *George Barnewell*, and *Injured Innocence*, and the dismal Passages in some late Comedys not to be rival'd, and imagine that the two *Cibbers*, who are reputed Judges of Something more than Action, and the few other good Actors of that House, would ever burden their Memories with such an Heap of indigested Trash, or condescend to be the Spokesmen of such Nonsense?

Here I interrupted him again, and assured him, notwithstanding his great Surprise, that all the Plays which he had named had been performed in *Drury-Lane*, and *Lincoln's-Inn-Fields*; but, as I have been neither a Spectator nor Reader of [13] any of them, I told him I could not judge of the Justness of his Censure; and that my Opinion of his good Taste and Understanding will keep me from reading them. One Play I mentioned to him as not liable to the Censure which he had passed on the rest; which is the modern Husband. I own, says he, that is a Comedy which gave me Pleasure, tho it is not entirely conformable to the Rules of the Drama.

By the Rules of the Drama, says I, you mean, I presume, the Rules of Critics, who have no Right to impose Rules: the antient Writers of Tragedy and Comedy divided their Plays into five Acts, in which we have generally followed their Example; and I know no other stated Rule to be observed; and that may be departed from sometimes without any Disadvantage. Unerring Reason is the only Guide in Tragedy and Comedy, tho a Man who is merely a reasonable Man, and no more, is not qualified to write either, particular Talents being requisite for both, under the Conduct of Reason; and that Poet who wants any other Rule besides Nature or Reason mistakes his Province when he attempts to write. The *modern Husband* I acknowledge to have some Scenes independent on the main Busyness of the Play, and some Expressions the Omission of which would be no Detriment to the Work; yet it has



Wit, Humour, Satire, and moral Reflections not unworthy the Pen of the best Stoic. If indeed the Author had made every Scene conducive to the principal Design, to the Plot of the Play, and as dependent one on the other as every Link in a Chain, and every Expression as necessary as every Scene, he would have produced a more perfect Piece than it now is: and I doubt not but that he, who is capable of writing so entertaining a Play as it [14] now is, is ingenuous enough to confess these Truths, and to acknowledge that his Intent was to expose particular Vices and Follies, to make these ridiculous and those odious, to give his Audience Pleasure and himself Profit, and that he had not Leisure to make it otherwise than it now is, and that he laughs, without Anger, at those who expose themselves by a fruitless Endeavour to expose him.

My Friend, who now thought it his Turn to speak again, asked me what I thought of the Character of *Lady Charlotte*, some Objections to which he had seen, he said, in a paultry weekly Journal in March last, the Title of which he had forgot. I own the Possibility, continued he, of such a Character, tho I never met with one like it, which I attribute to my living chiefly in the Country, and not conversing much with Ladys in Town. To whom I replied, you speak like a reasonable Man; and the ignorant *Thing*, who published his Objections in the paultry weekly Journal of which you before spoke, discovered himself to have no Notion of Humour, and that his Conversation was not among Persons of superior Rank, especially the Ladys; for, if it was, he must have met with more than one *Lady Charlotte*, or at least with some who partake of that ridiculous foolish Alertness, and Volubility of talking Nonsense, joined to an extraordinary Opinion of themselves, and a Fondness for Gaming and every fashionable Folly, all which constitute the Character of *Lady Charlotte*: so whether the Follies represented in her meet in one real Person, (as I am certain they often do) or are divided among several, and she made a Compound of them all, she is a proper Character for Comedy. As I was proceeding in my Remarks [15] on this Character a young Lady came in, and, immediately addressing herself to my Friend, occasioned the following Dialogue.

*Lady.* Mr. *Manly*! Where have you been these fifty Years since last Summer?

*Manly.* Where, Niece, have you learn'd this Manner of talking within these few Months? Who do you keep Company with?

*Lady.* My Companions, Sir, are all Persons of the *Beau Monde*, who have not their Equals at Hazard, and who never stay from a Masquerade or Opera.

*Manly.* I hope, Madam, the Masquerade has no Charms to you.

*Lady.* The Masquerade! I have been at a hundred this Winter. Ha'n't you seen the *Oratorio*, Sir?

*Manly.* I have read it.

*Lady.* Read it! But the Music! O! I cou'd sit a thousand Years to hear it!

*Manly.* I wou'd not be a Slave, Cousin, to what ought to be the Amusement of but a few Minutes.

*Lady.* And ha'n't you really been at the *Oratorio*? All the World is fond of the *Oratorio*.

*Manly.* Then all the World is fond of Nonsense.

*Lady.* Well, you are the strangest Man still that ever was. I have five hundred Visits to pay this Morning, and have made but fifty of them yet. Mr. *Manly*, your Servant.

[*The Comedian, or Philosophical Enquirer* 3 (June 1732): 11-15.]

Anything but "reflections" (and clearly not on "some" plays), this is a shrewdly constructed defense of *The Modern Husband*, Fielding's best theatrical work. Originally composed in summer 1730, the comedy premiered on February 14, 1732 at the Drury-Lane theatre. Its commercial success (14 performances, including a Royal command) brought nearly £1000 to Fielding,<sup>5</sup> but also generated strong criticism in the Opposition press, if only for its dedication to Robert Walpole.<sup>6</sup>

The "paultry weekly Journal" mentioned above was *The Grub-street Journal* of March 30, 1732 (no. 117), which reserved its entire front page for an attack on the play signed by "DRAMATICUS." Fielding was charged with disrespect for the rules and dramatic aims of comedy, for stuffing the plot with redundant characters and endangering its coherence. Nearly a third of the critique centers on Lady Charlotte, an "impertinent" character of Fielding's "own invention."<sup>7</sup> Although the *Modern Husband* disappeared from the stage after March 18, it had already been available in print and attacks on its dramatic merits continued through the summer. On June 29, again on the front



page of the *Grub-street Journal*, "PROSAICUS" asserted that the play "betrays want of judgment" and shows "hasty writing."

*The Comedian, or Philosophical Enquirer* was one of few publications to support Fielding, and its publisher (Thomas Cooke) settles score with the *Grub-street Journal* by way of dramatization. He uses narrative and dialogue, and deploys two antithetical characters to unfold his argument. The bait here is a sour country gentleman with conservative tastes and even leanings to conspiracy theory. Aptly named "Mr. Manly," he laments the capital's falling theatrical standards and offers a blanket condemnation of recent plays (though he curiously remembers several of them by name).

From this low point, the author gradually begins to advance his case. He proposes the *Modern Husband* as a bright exception and, after securing Manly's partial consent, he goes on to support Fielding's anti-classicist stance. Nature and reason, instead of ancient models, should guide the dramatist's pen; and moral objectives (attacking vice, for instance) may override the need for structural integrity.

Only in the third section do we learn about the actual target of the piece: DRAMATICUS's attack on the portrayal of Lady Charlotte. Just when Manly questions the plausibility of such a character, the author delivers his coup. He has a fashionable lady accosting Manly and switches gear to direct speech. The concluding dialogue seems to have been lifted from Fielding's play. Compare the lady's rhetorical mannerisms and exaggerated tone with some of Lady Charlotte's statements: "I thought it impossible for any one to be alive, and not be at the Rehearsal of the new Opera. [...] Oh! ev'ry Body was there; all the World"; "I have not above fourteen or fifteen Places to call at."<sup>8</sup> *The Modern Husband* mirrors reality itself, seems to be the author's punch line. Years later, Fielding himself would recall that a Lady "of the first Rank [...] very eminent for her Understanding, declared [Lady Charlotte to have been] the Picture of half the young People of her Acquaintance."<sup>9</sup>

The piece may be a response to criticisms from March 1732, yet it seems to have been written after the publication of *See and Seem Blind* (June 8). The lady's enthusiasm for the oratorio reflects similar statements in the pamphlet:

This being a new Thing set the whole World a Madding; Han't you been at the *Oratorio*, says one? Oh! If you don't see the *Oratorio* you see nothing, says t'other; [p. 15]

Ha'n't you seen the *Oratorio*, Sir? [...] And ha'n't you really been at the *Oratorio*? All the World is fond of the *Oratorio*.

The *Esther* craze among fashionable ladies justified Fielding's portrayal of Lady Charlotte in the *Modern Husband*. The evocation of the oratorio madness a full month after *Esther*'s last performance (May 20) indicates the strong radiance of the new genre. Alas, its novelty obscured any appreciation of its content, dramatic and moral. It says a lot that both the "Reflections" and the poetic diary from May 16, fail to mention *Esther* by name. Lady Charlotte helps us understand this point: "I never know [what the Play tonight is]. [...] I saw four Acts the other Night, and came away without knowing the Name. I think, one only goes to see the Company."<sup>10</sup>

In view of Fielding's later support of Handelian oratorio – we recall a full chapter in *Amelia* set during an oratorio performance – we should take good notice that in 1732 the genre (or rather *Esther*) stood the furthest away from a moral entertainment. The reversal of its cultural polarity in the decades to follow had less to do with structural improvements and more with a shifting social context and function.

— Ilias Chrissochoidis

#### (Endnotes)

1 "A 'fam'd Oratorio ... in old English ... sung': *Esther* on 16 May 1732," *The Handel Institute Newsletter* 18/1 (Spring 2007): [4-7].

2 [?Aaron Hill], *See and Seem Blind: Or, A Critical Dissertation on the Publick Diversions, &c. Of Persons and Things, and Things and Persons, and what not. In a Letter from the Right Honourable the Lord B— to A— H— Esq* (London: H. Whitridge, [1732]; repr. with introduction Robert D. Hume [Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, Los Angeles, 1986]), iii-iv.

3 *The Grub-street Journal*, no. 129, Thursday 22 June 1732, [3].

4 Its nine issues ran from April 1732 to April 1733 and were written by Thomas Cooke.

5 *See and Seem Blind*, 8.

6 For discussions of the play, see Martin C. Battestin with Ruthe R. Battestin, *Henry Fielding: A Life* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 127-33; Robert D. Hume, *Henry Fielding and the London Theatre, 1728-1737* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 121-29; and Peter Lewis, *Fielding's Burlesque Drama: Its Place in the Tradition* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1987), 132-34.

7 Battestin, *Fielding*, 131-33.

8 Henry Fielding, *The Modern Husband. A Comedy. As it is acted at the Theatre-Royal in Drury-Lane. By His Majesty's Servants* (London: J. Watts, 1732), 26, 30.

9 Henry Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling*, 4 vols. (London: A. Millar, 1749), 2:180 (Book 8, Chapter 1).

10 *The Modern Husband*, 36.

## FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK (SPRING/SUMMER 2008)

Because I was on sabbatical during this past spring semester I was able to attend more conferences than I can in a normal year, and I found a Handelian presence at most of them. The first was held in London at the end of January to celebrate "John Rich and the Eighteenth-Century London Stage." This was a truly interdisciplinary affair, with contributions from historians of theater and dance as well as music. Corbett Blazer of Columbia University spoke about "Harlequin Xerxes: Handel after Rich" while Robert Anthony Torre from the University of Wisconsin at Madison held forth on "Cultural Translation and Handel's *Pasticcis*." On another session Deborah W. Rooke of King's College London spoke about "Samson down the Centuries: From Biblical Text to Handelian Oratorio" from the standpoint of a biblical scholar, while Donald Burrows examined the composition history of *Ariodante* in a paper stimulated by his work on the recently published HHA edition of that opera. A revised version of this latter paper was given under the title of "Re-tracing the Steps of the Composer in Handel's *Ariodante*" as The Stanley Sadie Memorial Lecture 2008 on June 24. This event was sponsored by the Handel House Museum and took place in the larger venue of the Portrait Gallery in The Foundling Museum, an example of ongoing fruitful collaboration between these two important London institutions.

At the Thirteenth Biennial International Conference on Baroque Music hosted by the School of Music at the University of Leeds from July 2-6, there was an interesting analytical paper by Fred Fehleisen of The Juilliard School and Mannes College on "If God is for us: Handel's Musical-Rhetorical Summation of *Messiah*" and a paper by Ivan Curkovic of the University of Zagreb entitled "The Interdependence of Music and Drama in Certain Handel Operas: Attempts at an Interdisciplinary Approach" which applied certain elements of dramatic theory to a select group of operas without eliciting unexpected results. One of the highlights of the conference was a concert by the Leeds Baroque Choir under the direction of Peter Holman consisting mostly of 17<sup>th</sup>- and 18<sup>th</sup>-century music from the English Chapel Royal authentically accompanied by organ, cello and lute. This provided a rare opportunity to hear Handel's first setting of the anthem *As pants the hart*, HWV 251a, together with anthems by Purcell, Croft and Greene.

As 2008 enters its final quarter many of us will be looking forward to the celebrations of 2009 marking not only the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Handel's death but also significant anniversaries for Purcell, Haydn and Mendelssohn as well. I hope as many AHS members as possible will be able to participate in our own celebration hosted by Centre College at the end of February and described elsewhere in this issue of the Newsletter. There will also be expanded versions of the annual Handel Festivals in Göttingen and Halle, a major four-composer conference in Oxford, and numerous local performances. For Handelians all of this will culminate in a major conference on "Purcell, Handel and Literature" to be held in London on November 20-21, 2009, sponsored by the Institutes of Musical Research and English Studies and the School of Advanced Studies of the University of London, the Departments of Music and Literature of The Open University, The Handel Institute and The Purcell Society.

We can also look forward to new editions of Handel's works, including volumes of the ongoing Hallesche-Händel-Ausgabe and Novello Handel Edition, new printed and online resources, and new recordings and videos. It may seem unlikely that this output will exceed that of the 1985 anniversary year, but I am prepared to be pleasantly surprised. The primary goal of the AHS is to support the study and performance of Handel's music, and I urge us all to do whatever we can to carry forward the momentum generated since 1985 into next year and beyond.

— Graydon Beeks

### NEWSLETTER of The American Handel Society

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Payments in dollars for GFH or HI memberships must be received before 1 June.