

‘PERFORMING HANDEL – THEN AND NOW’

**Handel Institute Conference at The Foundling Museum,
Brunswick Square, London W. 1, on 26-27 November 2005**

The performance of Handel’s music, in his day and ours, is the theme of the sixth Handel Institute conference, which will take place this year on the last weekend in November. This is the first such conference to be held at The Foundling Museum, home of the Gerald Coke Handel Collection, and the first to host a number of speakers from the world of performance as well as from the groves of academe. The range of topics to be discussed is broad and the demand for places expected to be high; so if you are thinking of attending, please complete and return the enclosed booking form as soon as possible!

You may also be interested to know that on the day before the Handel conference, Friday 25 November, The Foundling Museum will be hosting the 21st Annual Conference on Music in 18th-Century Britain. For further details please contact Claire Sharpe (c.sharpe@ram.ac.uk or telephone +44 (0)20 7701 8038).

Graydon Beeks

Performance Practice at Cannons

Taking into consideration new evidence uncovered since the publication of my 1985 article on ‘Handel and Music for the Earl of Carnarvon’, this paper will reconsider some questions concerning the performance of music at Cannons, the stately home of James Brydges, Earl of Carnarvon and later first Duke of Chandos. The questions

concern the musical repertoire that was performed, when and where it was performed, and the instrumental and vocal forces employed.

On the question of repertoire the paper will discuss what music is known to have been performed at Cannons and what sorts of additional music may have been performed there; it will ask how far these questions can be answered by the catalogue of the Cannons music library and by the surviving exemplars from that library. On venues, the paper will discuss the configuration of the recently restored St Lawrence, Little Stanmore, where Handel's Cannons anthems were first performed, propose a configuration for the chapel at Cannons House, which was torn down in 1747 (the contents being dispersed) and consider what is known of the music room there and the possibility of outdoor performance. As for performing forces, the paper will discuss what is known of the layout and pitch of the organs in St Lawrence and the Cannons chapel, as well as the voice types and ranges of the singers and the skill and versatility of the instrumentalists employed at Cannons. It will also consider the likelihood of additional performers having been imported from London for special events.

Finally, the paper will conclude with a list of Cannons music that one might wish to hear. Among these would be performances of the Cannons anthems, with appropriately small forces and at an appropriately high pitch; *Acis and Galatea*, with the correct distribution of solos and the added bassoon as indicated in the lost conducting score; and the anthems of Nicola Haym and cantatas of Thomas Roseingrave.

Donald Burrows

Musical Notation and its Role in Handel Performances

This paper will firstly review the surviving performing material that may have been used in, or prepared for, Handel's own performances. From it we can make some generalisations about the type of material that Handel's performers had in front of them and the amount of information that it carried on matters of performance. Second, the role of notation in modern performances will be considered, and in particular the diversity of expectations about the degree of prescriptiveness in performance material. This diversity implies different levels of editorial intervention in the presentation of the notation, different expectations about the role of the performers and thus the continuing possibility of different interpretations of the same notation.

Timothy Day

What do the recordings tell us?

In 1907, just as recordings of Handel were beginning to be made, a distinguished historian considered that, while 'a very considerable cleansing process' had begun, English worshipers still heaped indignities on the head of their idol, that the score of *Messiah* 'is full of careful directions that at least ninety-nine per cent of our performances complacently and totally ignore'. Critics pleaded for a reincarnation of Handel's music 'in the terms in which Handel conceived it', and in 1980 the editor of *The New Grove* was delighted at a 'revelatory' reading of *Messiah* which achieved just that, in his estimation, and allowed him to reconsider 'what kind of a work *Messiah* is and what Handel was saying in it'. Music not being sounds but that which is not heard, as Mahler reminded us, mere recordings can never tell us the whole story. But recordings of Handel together with words about the recorded performances do perhaps allow important insights into the minds of the men and women who loved this music in the twentieth century.

Anthony Hicks

The Ethics of Period Performance:

Some Aspects of the Performer/Audience Relationship

The distinctive characteristic of period or ‘historically informed’ performance, at least by implication, is that it offers to an audience the chance to hear music performed with the instrumental and (less certainly) vocal sonorities anticipated by its composer.

There is usually a further implication that the performance will conform to the stylistic conventions of the period, as far as they are understood, and that the underlying music text will have been soundly prepared. While some early music performers adhere to these principles, an increasing number do not, and their work may contradict the ‘historical information’ by which they are supposedly guided.

Audiences led to expect ‘period’ fidelity may thus be denied that experience, and are not made aware (*e.g.*, in programme notes) of how historically deviant a performance may be; indeed, the impression may be given that there is no such deviance.

Ostensibly, this is a breach of professional ethics, yet it is a topic that remains largely undiscussed by commentators in both popular and academic outlets. Some areas for discussion will be outlined.

Peter Holman

Handel, the Viola da Gamba and its Players in London

A number of scholars have tried to understand why Handel specified the viola da gamba in two works written around 1724, his opera *Giulio Cesare* and a variant of the violin sonata in G minor, HWV364b, and have attempted to identify the musician or musicians who might have played them. This paper revisits the topic in the light of

new research into the lives of the circle of gamba-playing Italian cellists around Handel, and places the two works in the context of other gamba music written or arranged in London at the time. Some newly identified gamba arrangements of Handel will also be discussed.

David Hunter

The Audience Speaks: Comments on Performances of Handel's Music, 1711–1759

Three questions frame the discussion initiated by this paper. 1: What do we know least about, concerning the performance of Handel's music? Not the music itself, nor how it was performed, nor when or where it was performed: great strides have been made in developing our understanding of those areas. The vital missing element is the audience, for without one a piece of music can have meaning only to musicians. 2: What do archives reveal concerning performances? Only by thorough investigation of the archives of persons who did or did not attend performances can we hope to establish what the performances meant to individuals. I will explore some of the material uncovered at the nearly fifty repositories that I have visited so far. 3: What do the comments tell us about the audience? The audience, so far as can be determined from the sample studied to date, provides a different and, from a musicologist's viewpoint, quite unsatisfactory account of performances. That the minutiae of performance practice, such as ornamentation or alterations to librettos, receive no mention should not cause us to dismiss the materials as irrelevant. The aesthetic concerns of the audience operate at a quite different level, for example in determining whether or not one goes to opera or oratorio, both or neither. Once at the performance, the memorability of the occasion may not reside in the work. Though this may be a major source of concern to musicologists (and Handel apologists), it is

part of the reality with which Handel dealt and we should accord it close consideration.

David Ross Hurley

Handel's Compositional Choices in Theodora

Theodora, Handel's penultimate oratorio, contains a fair number of revisions that the composer made before first performance. The *raison d'être* of this paper is, above all, to explore the aesthetic issues raised by fascinating revisions in three arias. Along the way I address certain caveats or criticisms of studies of compositional process that have arisen over the past few years. One view, raised in a recent review of my book *Handel's Muse*, questions whether revisions can reflect typical compositional practices; according to this view, because Handel composed fluently and without difficulty, revising his music only during 'unusual' moments when problems appeared, compositional changes are by their nature abnormal and tell us little about the composer's typical concerns. In opposition to this criticism, I will demonstrate how the revisions in *Theodora* may in fact disclose specific compositional concerns, for they reveal aspects of the music that we might not have noticed otherwise. They are a guide to musical analysis, in other words. A second critic has attacked studies of compositional changes in general for maintaining that the final version always constitutes an 'improvement' of the original. After discussing the relevance of this view to Handel, I will examine a revision in *Theodora* that actually weakens the effectiveness of an aria. I conclude, however, that in the revisions made prior to first performance (and unrelated to such issues as cast changes) Handel generally sought to improve his scores and only occasionally fell short of doing so.

Neil Jenkins

John Beard: the Tenor Voice that inspired Handel, Arne and Boyce

This paper presents some results from the author's research into the remarkable career of the tenor John Beard (c. 1716–91). Newly discovered facts include details of his first marriage to Henrietta, daughter of Earl Waldegrave, which took place in the Fleet Prison on the same day (8 January 1739) that he sang the role of Jonathan in the dress rehearsal of Handel's *Saul* at the Haymarket Theatre, and the reasons for his trip to France in 1740, immediately following the wedding of Princess Mary (in which he had repeated his solo from the 1736 Wedding Anthem), which resulted in Handel rewriting *Imeneo* without him in it.

Beard's commitments for the oratorio seasons of 1748, 1749 and 1750 reveal that he could have been in Handel's company of soloists if he had been invited, as he had no clashes with theatrical performances on the relevant dates. The Foundling Hospital *Messiah* parts have often been interpreted as implying that soloists sang with the choruses; Beard's commitments elsewhere show this to have been unlikely, and a reason is given for his refusal of a fee for his annual Foundling Hospital *Messiah* performance. Information is provided on his performances in Handel's operas and oratorios, before and after the composer's death, and his appointment as 'Vocal Performer in Extraordinary' to George II is outlined. The Handel quotation on his memorial stone in Hampton parish church is described, and a possible explanation given as to why this musical theme was chosen, rather than any other of the famous airs that he premièred (e.g., 'Every valley', 'Where'er you walk', 'Total eclipse', 'Sound an alarm').

Richard G. King

Acting Alexander

Concerning the performance of Handel's operas, Reinhard Strohm once observed that 'if we had a Senesino, who had a deep understanding not only of singing but also of reciting Italian verse and not least of how to be an Emperor, it might not matter so much that some of his arias were by Harnoncourt and not Handel. In fact they could even be by Penderecki'. The remark was no doubt meant to be provocative, but it seems to me that Professor Strohm has a point here, and it is one that I should like to explore in this paper using the example of one emperor, Alexander the Great. The paper will examine how Alexander might have been acted in Handel's time and in his operas *Alessandro* and *Poro* by examining images of Alexander in painting and statuary. One of my goals is to extend our current understanding of Baroque gesture by taking seriously what the acting tutors and treatises have to say: that a complete performance is possible only after careful study of gesture in art. Another goal is to establish how far our understanding of Handel's Alexander and, by extension, other operatic heroes can be shaped by comprehension of what it means 'to be an Emperor'.

Annette Landgraf

A Quest for the Ideal Performance

Handel's oratorios have long held a special fascination for musicians and audiences, from their first performance to the present day. This paper presents a survey of the reception history and performance practice history of these works, with special emphasis on the various performances and debates that took place during the 19th century.

Ever since his death, performances have kept Handel's music alive, offered unforgettable experiences and conveyed real enthusiasm for his oratorios. His

successor, John Christopher Smith (junior), made the first important contribution by continuing the Lenten oratorio seasons in London, although he did not necessarily perform the works as Handel had written them. There followed Samuel Arnold, Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, and Friedrich Chrysander. Others, like Ignaz von Mosel and Robert Franz, sought to adapt the works in a contentious way. In addition, English conductors such as George Smart and Michael Costa need to be considered.

Today we can look back on many experiments, including arrangements and attempts at instrumentation, leading to the monumental 19th-century performances at the Crystal Palace. The experiments sought to explore the possibilities and the limits, often amid fierce controversy. Arguments raged between ‘philologists’ and promoters of arrangements. Philologists advocated performances according to the so-called ‘original’ score, while promoters pursued the aesthetics of 19th-century sound. Opinions ranged between the extremes, between purism and extravagance, probably best illustrated by Eduard Hanslick’s public abuse of Chrysander as a ‘Kunstzealot’ (art-zealot). Agreement between the parties was never achieved. Each experiment and debate adds to our knowledge, whichever argument is advanced. The discoveries and mistakes made by musicians and musicologists in the 19th and in the first half of the 20th century paved the way to the modern performance practice of historic music.

Konstanze Musketa

Handel Performances in Halle in the Late 20th Century

Performing Handel in Halle has a tradition that lasts about 200 years. Enthusiasm for Handel’s music increased in the middle of the 20th century. The Händel-Haus Museum was opened to the public, an annual Handel festival was established and the Georg-Friedrich-Händel-Gesellschaft was founded. To make Handel’s music popular

to the general public in Halle in the ‘Golden Fifties’, many works by him, especially operas, were arranged more or less heavily. Playing on period instruments, for example, was practised in the Händel-Haus, but this was rather an exception at that time. In the meantime performing styles have changed remarkably, giving rise to much more ‘authentic’ performances. This paper will focus on the performances of the 1980s and 1990s and compare them with those of the 1950s and 1960s.

Michael Pacholke

Customs and Abuses in recent Handel Performances

The paper will contain: a comparison of the number of instruments in the different groups of instruments in the orchestra used in Handel performances in the late 20th and early 21st century with the number used in Handel’s own, performances, and conclusions drawn from this comparison; a discussion of the purpose of continuo realisation in modern Handel performing material; and a discussion of the purpose of singable translations in modern Handel performing material.

Andrew Parrott

Handel’s Italian Choirs

At different stages in his international career Handel composed church music variously for Lutheran, Anglican and Roman Catholic worship. The cathedral choirs that he encountered in England and Ireland have perhaps come to be regarded as historical models for today’s performances of most if not all of this music. Against the background of the composer’s early Lutheran experience, this paper looks at contemporary Italian practices that will have informed the first performance of his Roman works, not least the virtuoso *Dixit Dominus*.

Graham Pont

French Overtures at the Keyboard: the Handel Tradition

In a number of articles I have criticised the modern use of consistent over-dotting in the introductory movements of Handel's French overtures. This manner goes back to William Crotch (1775–1847), whose numerous arrangements of these movements are very fully double-dotted. Crotch's uniform rhythms, in my view, represent a possible but by no means obligatory interpretation of the French entrée, but his consistent over-dotting is certainly not authentic. It is at best a crude and simplified representation of an older and more varied manner that presumably was employed by Handel himself and certainly was so by a small but significant number of his British successors.

The evidence for what I consider the genuine Handel tradition of arbitrary and irregular rhythmic alteration is drawn mainly from editions and performances of overtures that survived in the continuous repertoire from Handel's time until the 20th century.

John H. Roberts

Performing Recitative Cadences: Notation, Convention, and Recent Practice

Three interrelated issues arise in performing the standard types of perfect cadence found in the *secco* recitative of Handel's day: application of vocal appoggiaturas, placement of the final chords in relation to the voice, and use of 4-3 suspensions in the dominant chord. Scholars such as Winton Dean and Dale Monson have made us more aware of the changing conventions of the period, but confusion remains about how performers interpreted the notation, and recent practitioners of historically

informed performance, while adopting authentic ways of executing such cadences, have also developed variants that have no foundation in eighteenth-century practice. We must recognize too that Handel's usage may have differed to some extent from that of his Italian contemporaries.

David Vickers

An Opera Aria Cadenza written by Handel?

The renaissance of Handel's operas has been a particularly significant and rewarding aspect of the early music revival during the last forty years. However, one of the most elusive and controversial aspects of Baroque opera performance is how a modern singer might deliver an appropriate cadenza in conclusion to an aria. It is an understandable compromise to suggest that such matters were a matter of taste during Handel's career, and must remain so now. With the international performance of Handel operas now firmly established, there is an uncomfortable discrepancy between plain performances that ignore such stylistic conventions as the cadenza, and elaborate interpretations that positively encourage extreme solutions. The most considerable obstacle to a historically plausible option in modern performances of Handel's opera arias is our inability to discern what the composer wanted his singers to sing at the moment when his score indicates the potential for a cadenza. New evidence found at Hamburg in performance manuscripts of *Arianna in Creta* (HWV 32) sheds light on Handel's direction of one particular aria that potentially provides an authentic model for modern cadenza performance.