

THE HANDEL INSTITUTE

NEWSLETTER

We apologize for the late appearance of this issue, which is due to a variety of factors beyond our control. It begins with an appreciation by Donald Burrows of the eminent American Handelian Howard Serwer, who helped to revitalize the *Hallische Händel-Ausgabe* by bringing international Handel scholars together and influenced the prehistory of The Handel

Institute. Stanley Pelkey reports on his research as the recipient of a Handel Institute Award, and Winton Dean and Terence Best review Handel opera performances at home and abroad. Friends are kindly asked to read the enclosed Note from the Treasurer and take appropriate action without delay.

Colin Timms

HOWARD SERWER (1928-2000)

There was a particular poignancy about the death of Howard Serwer on 3 May, the day before the opening event of the Maryland Handel Festival, a performance of *Susanna*. With Paul Traver, Howard had achieved at Maryland a rare degree of practical interaction between scholarship and performance with the establishment of an ambitious plan to perform Handel's English oratorios in chronological order in the musical versions of their first performances. It is sad that he did not live to see the project through to *Jephtha* (or even *The Triumph of Time and Truth*).

Accompanying the Festival were the conference sessions - initially under the aegis of the University of Maryland, College Park - that have played a considerable part in bringing together and sustaining the international community of Handel scholars. Howard realized that Handel studies needed not merely occasional contacts but regular meetings, and Maryland has played a crucial role as the leading contributor in America. Somehow, in bad times and worse, Howard secured sufficient funding to make things happen (in 1982 he was responsible for my own first trip across the Atlantic, to Maryland, and indeed my first venture on to an aeroplane). In 1985 he, Paul Traver and J. Merrill Knapp founded the American Handel Society which, apart from developing its own independent life, has



Howard Serwer, shaping up for *Samson* in sunny Maryland in November 1988

formed a happy partnership with the University of Maryland in sustaining the conferences.

Howard had joined the Maryland Music Faculty in 1968, on completing his PhD in Musicology at Yale. This was the confirming moment in his new career, for he had previously qualified and practised as an accountant: like Handel becoming English, Howard became a musical scholar because he chose to. He followed his interests as a researcher and teacher with enthusiasm and professionalism. Some of his interests are

reflected in his edition of Graun's passion-oratorio *Der Tod Jesu* (1975) and his co-editing of *Haydn Studies* (1981). Nevertheless, it was Handel's music that came to dominate his research activity: I suspect that, as others have found, a little project on Handel turned out to be larger and more complicated than expected. The 'little project' was the editing of *Esther*. After much labour, the 'Cannons' version came to publication in 1995 (*HHA*, I/8). Howard had also done considerable preparatory work toward the complex companion volume containing the music from Handel's various performing versions of the 1730s. But he was not just a 'one-work' Handelian: he also had a particular affection for the composer's Italian duets, which were the subject of an interesting article in the

Händel-Jahrbuch in 1993. In this, and in his subsequent *Jahrbuch* articles on the meteorology of the 'Water Music' (1996/7) and the adaptation of Handel's music into 19th-century New England psalmody (1998), we can still catch his urbane style and his enthusiasm for some of the unlikely corners of Handel scholarship.

It was *Esther* that began the chronological cycle of oratorio performances at Maryland on 14 November 1982. Of equal significance was the symposium on the previous afternoon at the Whittall Pavilion, Library of Congress, for it was from this that the momentum built up that was to lead over the following three years to the regeneration of the *Halleische Händel-Ausgabe* on the basis of a new collaboration between scholars and musicians in Germany, Britain and America. By 1982 there were a fair number of disgruntled Handel editors with grievances about the slow progress of their Halle volumes, and in the initial stages there was even talk of beginning a new Handel edition. Howard not only started the serious questioning, but also brought the participants together, sometimes in the most unlikely combinations and often entertained at his own expense. He was not afraid to make himself unpopular in the cause of moving and shaking, and he played a crucial role in the mediation between western attitudes and the practicalities of life in the Deutsche Demokratische Republik, where the edition was being produced. Although, with diplomatic finesse, he did not put himself forward for the Editorial Board of the revived *HHA*, the value of his initial role should not be forgotten.

Howard was always enthusiastic, sometimes precipitate and occasionally exasperating. He was also very generous in outlook, sensitive to the needs of others, and a great encourager of scholars and musicians in the early stages of their career. Accompanied by Nancy, he toured to London and Halle (and elsewhere), cementing good

relations as well as pursuing his research. When I last visited him, in May 1999, we took an extended walk around his Chevy Chase neighbourhood; his conversation was lively with his interests in music, the social dynamics of his communities, and the prospect of the paper that he hoped to read at the forthcoming Handel Institute conference. That paper, revisiting the stylistic assessment of Handel's music by Manfred Bukofzer that had been published in 1947 but hardly developed since, was precisely on the theme that I had envisaged for the conference. Sadly, by November 1999, Howard was unable to travel to London to deliver the paper himself; it was read on his behalf by Paul Traver. A transcript of the paper will be published in the next Handel Institute *Newsletter* as our tribute to a much-loved Handelian.

Donald Burrows

HANDEL AND SAMUEL WESLEY

A Case Study in Handel Reception in the Later Georgian Period

The posthumous reputation of Samuel Wesley (1766–1837), the younger son of Charles Wesley and one of the leading British organists and composers of his day, has rested on his organ voluntaries, Latin motets and advocacy of the music of J. S. Bach.¹ Much has been written about the influence of Bach on his mature compositional style for the organ, but very little has been published on the other influences, such as the music of Handel, that shaped his development. Although Wesley was an advocate of Bach and even praised him at the expense of Handel, he also had a lifelong professional interest in the latter's music; in fact, his criticism of the cult

of Handel in favour of Bach during the first two decades of the 19th century is more problematic than has been recognized.

Handel's music was at the centre of Wesley's early musical education and part of his family's domestic life. In his manuscript 'Reminiscences' of 1836 (*GB-Lbl*, Add. MS 27593) he recorded that his father was 'partial to the old Masters: Purcell, Corelli, Geminiani, Handel, and among the English Church Composers, Croft, Blow, Boyce, Greene &c were favourite authors with him' (f. 6r). Wesley also noted:

My Mother had very considerable vocal Talent: played prettily on the Harpsichord, and sang sweetly: In Handel's Oratorio Songs she much excelled, being blest with a Voice of delightful Quality, though not of very strong Power or extensive Compass. _ always exactly in Tune, and in good Taste, but free from the least Affectation, or Pretension to luxuriant Embellishments, or rapid Cadences, which are too often employed, to the Detriment and Disfigurement of the Melody, and are foreign to the Nature and Genius of the Composition.

Furthermore, Samuel's harpsichord teacher, the Bristol organist David Williams, taught the boy to 'execute with Justness and Precision' concertos by Corelli and Handel (f. 6v), and the young Samuel heard performances of Handel's oratorios in London (f. 27r) and the 'Dettingen' Te Deum in Bristol Cathedral.²

Among sources that confirm the elderly Samuel's account of the place that Handel's music had enjoyed in his childhood home is a letter from John Worgan referring to the Wesley brothers' interest in the music of Handel and [Domenico] Scarlatti:³

Monday, December 27, 1773

I trust Friend Samuell [sic], if he's

1 This article is based upon research on Handel reception for my dissertation, *British National Identity and Keyboard Music in the Later Georgian Period* (University of Rochester, forthcoming), supported in part by a grant from The Handel Institute.

2 Wesley wrote that he was 'thunderstruck' by the opening of the Te Deum: see *The Wesley-Bach Letters*, facsimile ed. P. Williams (London: Novello, 1988), Letter I, 17 September 1808.

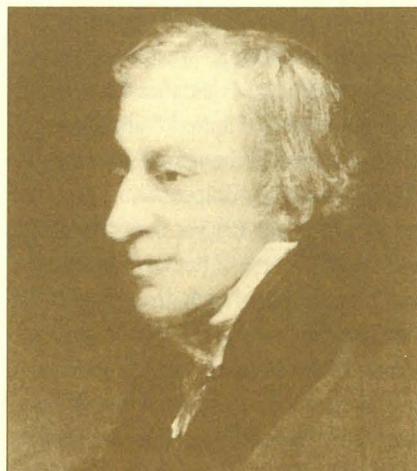


in Health, is as Pomposo as ever, more especially in the impulse he receives from Great Handel's Music. — am sorry [I] can't inform Charles [Jr.] of having had success in my application for leave to give that Leson [sic] of Scarlatti's, but he has others as good.

Charles Wesley Sr. also recorded in a letter that Joseph Kelway (*ca* 1702–82), the teacher of Charles Jr. and a pupil of Geminiani, warned him that the music of the 'Great Masters B. __ and A. __' (probably J. C. Bach and C. F. Abel) would ruin Charles, who should 'mind none of the musicians but Handel'.⁴ This advice was only partially heeded: the Wesley brothers performed music by both Handel and more modern composers during the annual series of subscription concerts that they held in their London home from 1779 to 1787,⁵ as this printed announcement for the 1781 season makes clear:⁶

PROPOSALS / FOR A / Third Subscription-Concert, / By Messrs. CHARLES and SAMUEL WESLEY, / In Chesterfield-Street, Marybone. THE CONCERT / To begin JANUARY 25, 1781, / and to be continued every other THURSDAY Evening, precisely / at Seven o'Clock. / The MUSIC performed, will be / 1. What is called the Ancient; especially that of HANDEL, / CORELLI, GEMINIANI, and SCARLATTI. / 2. The most Excellent, of a later Date. / 3. Their Own, of every kind; particularly Voluntaries on the Organ, / Extempore Lessons on the Harpsichord and Duets for Two Organs. / The Price, THREE GUINEAS for SEVEN CONCERTS.

There can be no doubt that Handel's music shaped Samuel Wesley's early musical education. He heard it performed at church, home, and hall as



Samuel Wesley (1766-1837)

a child; he studied it as part of his early musical education; he even copied portions of *Judas Maccabaeus*, *Saul* and 'Zadok the Priest' into one of his earliest lesson books (*Lbl*, Add. MS 31763). Finally, Samuel performed music by Handel in a semi-public forum with his brother Charles as a teenager and young adult.

Nevertheless, Wesley's public attitude toward Handel changed after 1800, and this change was clearly linked to his discovery of the music of J. S. Bach. In a letter of 19 October 1808 to his friend and fellow Bach enthusiast, Benjamin Jacob, Wesley wrote:

Upon the Continent [Bach's] fame has been so long circulated and established, that they must have for many years past sneered at our Ignorance of such an Author, professing (as we do) to be a Nation attached to Music. Salomon has said, truly and shrewdly enough, that the English know very little of the Works of the German Masters, Handel excepted, who (as he observes) came over hither when there was a great dearth of good Musick, and here he remained (these are his words) establishing a Reputation wholly Constituted upon the Spoils of the Continent.

This would nettle the Handelians devilishly; however it is the strict truth, for we all know how he pilfered from all manners of Authors whence he could filch anything like a Thought worth embodying; and although it is certain that what he had taken he has generally improved on (not when he robbed the Golden Treasury of Sebastian by the way), yet there is such a meanness in putting even his own subjects in so many different Works over and over again. ... Handel, for so great a Master, has as little just claim to merit of original genius as the most servile of his Imitators.

Such pronouncements (and there were others) are only part of the story of Samuel's relationship with Handel after 1800. Between about 1823 and 1825 Wesley prepared arrangements of Handel's twelve Italian duets and dozens of solos and duets from his oratorios.⁷ Many of these arrangements were published and are extant; others, principally those in *Lcm*, MS 4026, bearing what appear to have been plate numbers, may have been published by the Royal Harmonic Institution.⁸ Indeed, in a letter of 6 November 1824 to his brother Charles Jr., Samuel referred to his arrangements of Handel's Italian duets and to the fact that he had had 'much Employment from the Harmonic Institution in similar Jobs of arranging a Multitude of the Oratorio Songs from the Scores, and I believe they are now put into a more practicable and useful Form than they were heretofore'.

We cannot assume that Wesley made these arrangements out of sheer love of Handel's music. In a letter of 13 September 1824 to Vincent Novello, he wrote:⁹

From my Smattering in Latin I just venture to guess at a line of Italian,

³ *GB-Mr*, DDWes 7 / 118.

⁴ *Mr*, DDWes 7 / 105.

⁵ The programmes and accounts for the concerts survive in *Lbl*, and in *Mr*, DDCW 9 / 15 (last season only).

⁶ *Mr*, DDWes 7 / 41.

⁷ For details, see the list of Wesley's compositions in M. Kassler and P. Olleson (ed), *A Samuel Wesley Source Book* (London: Ashgate, forthcoming).

⁸ For example, 'Hark! tis the Linnet' bears the number 1551 in *Lcm*, MS 4026, and in the Royal Harmonic Institution edition.

⁹ *Lbl*, Add. MS 11729, f. 194r. I thank Philip Olleson for bringing this letter to my attention.

as far as an Opera Song goes, but having no Dictionary I steer without Rudder or Compass, only by the Stars of the Latin Roots. — You ask what's all this about? Why I am putting Chords to Handel's 13 Duets for the Accommodation of the Country Ladies and Gentlemen, under the divine Authority of the Royal Harmonic Institution. ... Now I like to understand the Words with which I meddle whether by Choice or Necessity: the latter is the Case at Present, and I shall feel it very kind if you will just sketch me out the Meaning of the Lines annexed in English.

This does not necessarily mean that Wesley despised Handel and his music, only that factors other than devotion - possibly the prospect of income - motivated him to prepare his editions and arrangements.¹⁰ In contrast, his editions of music by Bach failed to win the public over to the composer or to generate the kind of financial return for which Wesley presumably hoped. Nevertheless, he continued to perform, promote, copy, transcribe and publish Bach's music. Indeed, with the exception of *Lcm* MS 4026, Wesley's manuscripts from the 1810s and 1820s contain very few copies of pieces by Handel, while many contain his copies of music by Bach.

There can be no doubt that, in the second half of Wesley's life, Bach replaced Handel at the centre of his musical universe but that he continued to turn to Handel as part of his professional career. One could argue that it was disingenuous of Wesley to criticize Handel for pilfering the music of other composers and then to participate in the long-standing tradition, still going strong in the early 19th century, of publishing arrangements of

Handel's music for the domestic market. Perhaps Samuel was not as settled in his opinion of Handel and his music as he may have wanted to appear.

Some time in the late 1820s or early 1830s Wesley composed a series of keyboard duets for his daughter Eliza (1819-95).¹¹ The collection included a substantial four-hand arrangement of 'Zadok the Priest' and similar arrangements of vocal compositions by Mozart and Pergolesi. Despite what Wesley may have written twenty years earlier, Handel maintained a place in his canon of musical masters. If that were not so, he would not have returned to 'Zadok' as a piece worthy of study by the next generation of musical Wesleys. I believe that his conception of a canonic body of great compositions was shaping his thinking in the last decade or two of his life, because his 'Reminiscences' are dominated by his discussion of a 'litany' of canonic figures, including Handel.

This litany provides us with a list of the composers whom Wesley most respected - whose music he regarded as worthy of consumption and, more important, emulation in modern compositions. The composers of the late 18th century whom he most respected were Haydn and Mozart: he spent several pages discussing and comparing them and their music. The ancient composers whom he most admired were Purcell, Scarlatti, Handel, Corelli and, of course, Bach. Finally, he also admired William Russell, Samuel Arnold, William Crotch, James Hook, Charles Dibdin, Weber and Clementi, and singled out Boyce and Arne for special praise. He also advocated the study of 'Gregorian melody', which he discussed both in his 'Reminiscences' and in a manuscript treatise (*Lbl*, Add. MS 69853).

Wesley's interest in this ancient musical tradition was not merely academic; it had practical implications for his musical style:¹²

The Study ... of the old Italian Composers Palestrina, Leo, Allegri, and divers [sic] others, and the assiduous Cultivation of the Gregorian Melodies have jointly assisted in materially advancing my Progress in what I have attained, and I securely venture to recommend a similar Course to all those who aspire to that Excellence which diligent Application to such classical Patterns is alone calculated to Effect.

Indeed, the whole of Wesley's canon was the result of years of study as he searched for suitable materials for incorporation into his own musical works. He finished his 'Reminiscences' with the following advice (ff. 131r - 132r):

I beg Leave to advise all who study Music either professionally or merely for Amusement to study and cultivate the best Authors both ancient and modern, and particularly the Scores of the most classical Composers, whether of early or modern Date.

Wesley did just that throughout his professional life.¹³ In fact, his friend, publisher, advocate, and fellow Bach enthusiast Vincent Novello wrote of his secular song 'Twas not the spawn of such as these' (1825):¹⁴

This is indeed a most admirable imitation of Henry Purcell's style, for which Sam Wesley expressly intended it, as he says in the accompanying note to me. I have always thought that Sam's musical genius strongly resembled that of Purcell, with a mixture of Mozart, Handel & Sebastian Bach included.

10 The large number of early 19th-century arrangements of Handel's music suggests that there was a ready market for such pieces. Wesley's letters of 1826 to his sister Sarah bear witness to his severe financial difficulties at the time; she believed that the settings by Handel of hymn-texts by Charles Wesley, published by Samuel in 1825-6, might bring her brother financial gain (see B. Matthews,

'Wesley's Finances and Handel's Hymns', *Musical Times*, cxiv (1973), 137-9).

11 The period is suggested by Samuel's handwriting and Eliza's testimony.

12 *Lbl*, Add. MS 27593 ('Reminiscences'), f. 119r.

13 C. W. Pearce claimed that Wesley's twelve *Voluntaries*, Op. 6 (1802-8), revealed the

composer's intimate knowledge of the music of Arne, Arnold, Battishill, Boyce, Dupuis, Gibbs, Nares, Purcell, Roseingrave, Shield, and Stanley, as well as of Corelli, Scarlatti and Vivaldi (see 'A Notable Eighteenth Century Organ Concerto', *The Organ*, vii/25 (1927), 38-41).

14 *Lbl*, Add. MS 65454.



That Novello, who knew Wesley so well, heard Handel's voice within his friend's music, suggests that Wesley's compositional style cannot be adequately understood without investigation of the influence that Handel's music had on his works. In short, although the influence of Bach may have towered over Wesley's later compositional style, the music of Handel continued to haunt his life and works.

Stanley Pelkey

LONDON HANDEL FESTIVAL

Ottone

This was a most refreshing experience. Hitherto the London Handel Society operas, given in collaboration with the Royal Schools Opera, have been weak, if not disastrous, on the production side. In *Ottone* (3 and 4 April) Tom Hawkes showed exactly how they should be done, given a small stage and a limited budget. Movement during arias was confined to the ritornellos and at all times devised to clarify the complicated plot. Necessary supers not only kept still but formed attractive tableaux (aided by Peter Ruthven's tasteful period costumes), so that there was always something for the eye without detracting from the pleasure of the ear. This is not a negative quality, as thoughtlessly claimed in some quarters, but a very positive contribution to the enjoyment of Baroque opera. It threw the weight on to the singers, as it should, and both casts were strong enough to bear it.

Ottone is not quite in the front rank of Handel's operas (the plot creaks, and the hero is anything but heroic), but it contains plenty of fine music, and the performances did it justice. The London Handel Orchestra played well under Denys Darlow and Michael Rosewell, who might occasionally have allowed a little more light and shade. The opera was sung in Andrew Porter's fluent translation. There was little to choose between the two countertenors, Clint van der Linde and

Simon Baker. Both were admirable, vocally virile and hootless, holding out great promise for the future of this useful voice type. The two Teofanes also were excellent; Rachel Nicholls had the better stage presence, while Emma Gane deployed perhaps the most impressive voice of all. By the third act she was singing like a prima donna. Donna Bateman's personality was a little too amiable for the scheming matriarch Gismonda, but there was little the matter with her singing. Ann Johansson was more formidable, commanding the stage and delivering plenty of firm tone. The second castrato part, Gismonda's hen-pecked son Adelberto, is not the easiest assignment for female altos; Catrin Johnsson and Julianne Young, while a trifle under-powered, never fell below an acceptable standard. Much the same could be said of the two Matildas, Kristina Wahlin and Victoria Lowe, who might have been a little more positive in their characterization. Like everyone else, they improved over the course of the evening. The basses, Christopher Dixon and Adam Green, blustered effectively as the future Emperor Basil II masquerading as a pirate: that is just what Handel, writing piratical music, required Boschi to do.

The one disappointment could easily have been remedied. Three *Ottone* arias survive with Handel's autograph ornamentation, which is not only a stylistic guide but profoundly expressive. One of them, 'Benchè mi sia', was the single 'cut, apart from recitatives; the failure to make use of the other two, especially 'Affanni del pensier', was a great opportunity missed. Instead we had some indifferent ornaments, with excessive resort to that tiresome mannerism, shooting up the octave at the final cadence of the da capo. Once or twice in an opera is fair enough; to do it fourteen times is to commit the sin of exorbitancy.

Silla

Silla, the ugly duckling among Handel's operas, may have been pro-

duced at the Queen's Theatre in June 1713 (a wordbook was printed); if not, the London Handel Society's performance on 11 April in the concert hall of the Royal College of Music was the British première. As such it was very welcome, though the libretto, dealing with the scandalous misdeeds of the Roman dictator Lucius Cornelius Sulla, must be one of the worst ever offered to a decent composer. It is rich in fatuous non sequiturs both of plot and characterization.

The music is a different matter. Although he cannot make coherent sense of the characters, Handel gives them arias of touching eloquence when they are *in extremis*, and there is a remarkable scene in which Silla, falling asleep after a failed attempt at seduction, is visited in a dream by a god urging him to fire and slaughter. The score is incomplete; no music survives for the many spectacular scenes, including a Roman triumph, a gladiatorial show, and some astonishing nautical and meteorological events in the last act (it is not clear how the sole modern stage production, in Paris in 1990, coped with all this). Handel adapted many arias from his Italian cantatas, and used some of the best in *Amadigi* and *Radamisto*.

This was a concert performance, but suitable gestures helped bring the grotesque story to life. James Bowman, in splendid vocal form as the villain-hero, required to make seven indecent assaults on the female members of the cast, threw himself into his part with an enthusiasm that threatened to become infectious. Simon Baker, with the largest part and some of the best music, was in no sense dwarfed by the comparison. Natasha Marsh, fulfilling the promise shown in earlier productions, and Joanne Lunn sang the two love duets with great charm, and Rachel Nicholls made the most of the impossible part of Silla's wife Metella. Denys Darlow conducted with evident enthusiasm.

Winton Dean

EDINBURGH FESTIVAL

Alcina: Conception or Misconception?

The Stuttgart State Opera *Alcina*, given three performances at Edinburgh, like many recent Handel revivals in Germany (and not only there), was based on a 'concept'. The acid test of such a production, if it is to be taken seriously, is that the concept should fit the opera, if possible like a glove, and not distort it. This is particularly important in a major masterpiece whose stature has been revealed only in recent years, since audiences and even critics will have no standard by which to measure it. The Stuttgart production was an almost total misfit and a tasteless travesty.

The trouble was not the modern dress or the rejection of Baroque stage technique. Even the absence of magic, a major feature of the plot, might have been tolerable if something equivalent - magic in a metaphorical sense - had been devised, though it is difficult to see how this could work. There was no trace of such a thing, or of the central theme of the opera - the many-sidedness of love. Worst of all, the characterization, always the glory of Handel's operas, and in particular the subtle development of the principal figures in the course of the action, was obliterated. The persons emerged as a group of neurotic puppets untouched by sympathy, tenderness or passion. Consequently there was no build-up of tension, and although the score was considerably cut the evening dragged heavily.

Alcina is an opera about love in many aspects, not only sexual but conjugal (Bradamante), filial (Oberto), flighty (Morgana and Oronte, though Handel endowed the flirtatious Morgana with unexpected depth), paternal or at least tutorial (Melisso), for a moment even maternal. One of the most touching moments, and a characteristic stroke of dramatic irony, is the sudden softening of Alcina toward the boy Oberto just before she

learns of Ruggiero's desertion and plunges into her great tragic lament, 'Ah, mio cor!' In this production she attempted to seduce him. The entire evening was devoted to the exploitation of crude unadulterated sex, even when there is no justification for a relationship of any kind. At one point Oronte discarded his trousers and threatened a homosexual assault on Ruggiero.

The attempt in the programme to justify this approach was tendentious, to put it mildly. After an inaccurate summary of the plot, calculated to confuse the most attentive of readers, a discussion between the dramaturg (Sergio Morabito), director (Jossi Wieler) and designer (Anna Viebrock) treated a coherent and skilful libretto - and so, by implication, the score - with a measure of contempt at once perverse and pretentious, supported at the start by a statement (quite untrue) that in the 18th-century theatre illicit love could be presented only under the guise of magic. Handel's *Flavio* begins with an illicit assignation; and what about Congreve's and Handel's *Semele*, or indeed the whole of Restoration drama? We were then told that Alcina's magic powers had long gone, which made nonsense of the first act, where they are in full control till the moment in Act II when Melisso transforms the landscape. There was, of course, no place for this electrifying *coup de théâtre*.

Apart from the canoodling of Alcina and Ruggiero in the first act, very little that happened on stage made sense in terms of the opera that Handel wrote - and a great deal did happen. There was an inordinate amount of crawling, wrestling, boot-licking and polishing, groping, tying up and undressing during arias, whose only effect was to distract attention from the singer and the music. Alcina covered a fair distance on her stomach during Oberto's last aria. Ruggiero picked up a horn to sing 'Mio bel tesoro' and presently passed it to Bradamante (cuckoldry, by Jove! - except that there

is no adultery). On the other hand, he had to sing the greater part of 'Sta nell'Ircana', the most rousing aria in the opera, sitting on the floor.

The single set did not help. It represented a decaying salon with much miscellaneous bric-à-brac piled in a corner, including musical instruments (hence the horn), weapons ancient and modern, old boots (meet for kissing), a rocking chair set in motion during arias, not to mention such stale gimmicks as a naked electric light bulb and an overturned chair. The most prominent object was a huge two-way mirror whose function and what happened behind it were far from clear. Before the last act Bradamante and Ruggiero performed a wedding pantomime to the Act I ballet music, in the middle of which Melisso transferred the bridal adornments from Bradamante to himself. The end of the opera was a complete muddle; with the explanatory recitatives cut, Alcina was shot by Melisso but promptly reappeared, apparently reconciled to Ruggiero and Bradamante (the opposite of what Handel tells us), whereupon everyone sang two choruses in succession and threw everything they could lay hands on into the air.

As in the almost equally deplorable *Alcina* at the Coliseum last winter, the music was far better served. The orchestra, albeit on modern instruments, played respectably under Alan Hacker, whose tempos were generally apt and brisk. An occasional aria ('Semplicetto') was rushed, and 'Mi restano le lagrime' was so slow that it nearly stopped, and indeed did so unidiomatically before the da capo. The other cuts - one aria omitted, another repositioned, half a dozen reduced to A sections - were not mortal, though one or two might have been restored but for some debilitating pauses.

There was much fine singing, especially from Alice Coote (a splendid Ruggiero), Helene Schneiderman (Bradamante) and Claudia Mahnke (Oberto). Morgana and Oronte, who



suffered most from the cuts, had little chance to make their mark, though Catriona Smith sang a spirited ‘Tornami a vagheggia’. Catherine Naglestad had the makings of an impressive Alcina, but even more than the others was undercut by the production. How can a singer act convincingly with the voice when her actions bear no relation to the sentiments she is expressing? In the middle of the tremendous Act II finale, Alcina’s desperate appeal to her spirits, Naglestad turned her back on the audience and changed her dress. The da capo ornamentation was poor, especially in ‘Ah, mio cor!’, and most cadenzas discharged a rocket into the stratosphere, a thing that Handel conspicuously avoided in his surviving ornamented arias.

When will directors of opera learn that their first duty is to the score (including the libretto that inspired it), not to some fanciful notion that draws attention to themselves at the expense of the composer?

Winton Dean

HALLE, GÖTTINGEN AND DROTTNINGHOLM

In recent years the Handel festival in Göttingen has taken place during the week before that in Halle, so Handel freaks could take in both, with a day or two between them to draw breath and travel from one city to the other. This year, however, Göttingen clashed with Halle for reasons that remain obscure to me, connected apparently with the Expo 2000 in Hanover. So in Göttingen I could hear only *Messiah* and *Rodelinda*, a production celebrating the 80th anniversary of the Handel opera revival, which began with this work in Göttingen in 1920.

Radamisto

Halle offered the usual feast of riches, including the first production of the December 1720 *Radamisto* to use the new *HHA* score [ed. T. B.], conducted by Alan Curtis, and a first modern

performance of the 1756 *Israel in Egypt* (another recent *HHA* score, ed. Annette Landgraf), which used the entertaining if not quite convincing trick of having organ concertos, during the intervals, performed in the foyer, near the bar. There was also a production of *L’Antiope* (Dresden, 1689), the first two acts by Pallavicino, the third by Strungk, showing a fascinating shift of style from mid- to late 17th century; a repeat of last year’s *Alcina*, with the persistent pluckers in the continuo slightly less silly (cf. this *Newsletter*, x/2), and a host of smaller concerts, of which the most delightful was ‘Handel’s Beard’ in the lovely Kursaal at Bad Lauchstädt: this consisted of tenor arias of which some (but not all) were written for John Beard.

The production of *Radamisto* was modern, in the Peter Sellars mould, and as the curtain rose on officers in American uniform studying a table-model of the city about to be attacked, and a distressed Polissena made up as a Hillary Clinton look-alike frantically searching in her handbag for a cigarette, I thought, “Oh no, not again!” But I gradually warmed to it (there is a first time for everything), and many points were dramatically convincing, especially the scenes between Tiridate and Polissena in the second half of the opera, all played in an elegant officers’ mess during a drinks party. One strikingly good feature was the admirable performance of Anke Berndt as Fraarte, a soprano castrato role that has to be sung by a woman; she was not only dressed like a man, but had learned to walk and gesture in a masculine way, so much so that until she sang one could not tell which gender she was: other opera companies please note.

I was less sure about the treatment of Tigrane, a general in Tiridate’s army and another soprano role normally sung by a woman. Since in earlier centuries army generals were men, Handel’s castrato roles seem to create a casting problem. But wait: in a modern

army, especially an American one, a general can be a woman, so what better trick than to make Tigrane totally female? Problem: the plot says that ‘he’ is in love with Polissena. Solution (in 2000): change it so that ‘she’ is in love with Polissena. As this point became obvious, I feared that worse excesses were to come, but apart from one moment the implications were not developed and Tigrane ended up as a cosy sympathetic female friend in whom Polissena could confide.

One thing irritated me, and to this we shall return: in an otherwise well-played and sung performance, as complete as reason and time might allow, one crucial aria was cut – Zenobia’s climactic ‘Empio, perverso cor’ near the end of Act II. When I remonstrated with Alan Curtis, he said, “I know, I know, but the producer couldn’t fit it into her conception”.

Rodelinda

In Göttingen Nicholas McGegan conducted a splendid *Messiah*, though he took some movements much too fast, a tiresome habit that seems almost universal among early music conductors. Is it unreasonable to suppose that, when Handel wrote ‘Largo’ at the beginning of ‘Surely he hath borne our griefs’, he did not mean the movement to be taken at a brisk allegro?

Then we had *Rodelinda*, another recent *HHA* volume (ed. Andrew Jones), also conducted by McGegan, with Dominique Labelle in the title-role and Robin Blaze as Bertarido – a magnificent performance, sensibly staged. The sublime duet at the end of Act II drew tears all round, always a test of a good performance of this opera. But alas, one of the finest of Handel’s Act II conclusions was ruined by the omission of *Rodelinda*’s ‘Ritorna, o caro’, which comes a little before the duet. In conversation with McGegan I raised the matter of this piece of vandalism: “I know, I know”, he said, “but the producer couldn’t fit it into his conception”.

Tamerlano

It has been a good year for opera performances based on sparkling new *HHA* editions, and it was a delight to hear *Tamerlano* in the theatre of the gorgeous royal palace at Drottningholm, near Stockholm, where Charles Farncombe enjoyed a distinguished career as a visiting conductor some years ago. The rococo theatre is almost unchanged from its original form and ideal for Handel opera. Christophe Rousset conducted a very good performance of most of the original 1724 text, including the rarely-heard C-major version of Irene's 'Par che mi nasca', with its two Baroque clarinets (the instruments sounded magical). Nigel Robson was an outstanding Bajazet, if at times somewhat over-histrionic. Asteria's aria 'Se potessi un dì placare', which concludes Act II, was cut, as the action moved on to Act III without a break - a pernicious consequence of having only one interval. When I tackled Rousset about the omission, guess what: "I know, I know", he said, "it's a lovely piece, but the producer couldn't fit it into his conception".

Which is where we came in. A sinister development.

Terence Best

A REMINISCENCE OF CUZZONI

It is well known that Francesca Cuzzoni, ornament of the London opera and toast of the town in the 1720s, died in wretched poverty and obscurity at Bologna in 1770. According to an anecdote published almost a century after her death, 'Cuzzoni, when found famishing, spent the guinea given her in charity, in a bottle of tokay and a penny roll'. The old star, it would appear, still had a touch of class.

This reminiscence is preserved in Dr J[ohn] Doran's *Table Traits, with Something on Them* (London, 1854; 2nd edn 1854, 1859 and 1869), p. 502. Doran, a convivial gossip, is far from trustworthy: for instance, he ascribes Handel's famous dinner order ('I am de gompany') to the abstemious Haydn (p. 492). Nevertheless, the Cuzzoni anecdote has the ring of truth and may well belong to a genuine oral tradition.

I should be interested to know if any reader has come across an earlier source of this sad footnote to a brilliant career.

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HANDEL INSTITUTE AWARDS

The Handel Institute has awarded grants to the following individuals for research on the topics specified: Susanne Dunlap (New York), on the sources of the libretto of *Susanna*; David Hunter (Austin, Texas), on the Irish audience for and against Handel; Thomas McGahey (Champaign), on opera and patronage in Handel's London.

Applications are now invited for the next round of Handel Institute Awards for the furtherance of research projects involving the music or life of Handel or his contemporaries or associates. One or more awards may be offered, up to a total of £1000. **The deadline** for the receipt of applications is **1 September 2001**. For further information, please contact Dr Elizabeth Gibson, The Red House, Aldeburgh, Suffolk, IP15 5PZ (email: elizabeth@gibson.free-online.co.uk).

CHRISTOPHER HOGWOOD BECOMES H. I. PRESIDENT

Christopher Hogwood, CBE, has just accepted a unanimous invitation from the Trustees and Council to become President of The Handel Institute. Since its foundation the Institute has occasionally considered the adoption of a president to complement its other honorary appointees - its first patron (the late Gerald Coke) and fellows (the late Watkins Shaw and Brian Trowell) - but in the event Mr Hogwood will be the first to hold the office. His career combines the practical and scholarly in a way that is particularly appropriate to the Institute, which aims to take an all-round interest in Handel's music, career and context. As founding director, 25 years ago, of the Academy of Ancient Music, Mr Hogwood has been at the forefront of historically-informed developments in the performance of 18th-century music. Works by Handel have featured in some of his most successful enterprises: his recordings of *Messiah*, *Athalia* and *Orlando*, in particular, have set standards of musicianship and dramatic cohesion as well as of authenticity and style.

At the same time, Mr Hogwood has been concerned with questions relating to musical editions and written a major Handel biography. That his professional schedule is international is also highly appropriate for a president of the Institute, with its role in sustaining good relationships in Handelian activity between Britain, Germany and North America. Closer to home, he has taken an interest in the Gerald Coke Collection, the Handel House and The Foundling Museum, and he is well-informed about the Handelian projects that will come to fruition in London in the next few years. We welcome him as President and look forward to our collaboration.

Donald Burrows

The Handel Institute is a registered charity (no. 296615). Correspondence relating to the Newsletter should be sent to the editor, Professor Colin Timms, Department of Music, University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham, B15 2TT, England (email: C.R.Timms@bham.ac.uk). All other correspondence should be addressed to the honorary secretary, Dr Elizabeth Gibson, The Red House, Aldeburgh, Suffolk, IP15 5PZ (email: elizabeth@gibson.free-online.co.uk).