



THE HANDEL INSTITUTE

NEWSLETTER

The forthcoming anniversary conference on 'Purcell, Handel and Literature' is the leading feature in this issue, which includes the latest provisional programme and a booking form. We hope to see many of our readers at the University of London Senate House in two months' time. Donald Burrows investigates the circumstances of Handel's

Birthday Ode for Queen Anne ('Eternal Source of Light Divine'), while David Vickers and Terence Best contribute their regular, entertaining reviews of the summer Handel festivals in Göttingen and Halle. Finally, we also publish the result of the 2009 Stanley Sadie Handel Recording Prize.

Colin Timms

## ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE

### *Purcell, Handel and Literature*

19-21 November, Senate House, University of London

Promoted by: the Institutes of Musical Research and English Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London; the Departments of Music and Literature, The Open University; The Purcell Society; The Handel Institute

The international conference marking the anniversaries of Purcell and Handel is almost upon us! The Handel Institute is delighted to be collaborating with the Purcell Society and two universities on the promotion of this major scholarly and celebratory event. The programme, of which the latest version is given below, will surely appeal to music-lovers as well as to scholars, offering,

as it does, a wealth of contributions ranging from formal papers to a panel discussion, a concert, a reception and a dinner. We hope you will be able to come to some, at least, of the conference and look forward to seeing you there. A copy of the booking form is enclosed with this issue of the Newsletter; if you are planning to attend, please complete and submit it in good time.

### PROVISIONAL PROGRAMME

Thursday

Thursday 19 November

12.00 onwards Registration

14.00 Welcome

14.15 **Maureen Duffy and Martin Neary**

Music, Biography and the Purcell Tercentenary of 1995

15.15 **Andrew Pinnock and Bruce Wood**

*Alexander's Feast, or The Power of Perseverance:*

Dryden's Plan for English Opera and its Near-Fulfilment in a Handel Ode

15.50 *Tea/coffee*



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- A: The Power of Words**  
16.20 **Martin Adams**  
Unblest Sirens? The Tussle  
between Music and Words in Late  
17th-century Dramatic Opera
- B: Cultured Politics**  
**Andrew Shryock**  
The Faithful Text: Oratorio  
Wordbooks and Handel's Audience
- 16.55 **Konstanze Musketa**  
Handel and German Poetry
- 17.30 *Mini-break*
- 17.45 **Amanda Holden**  
Handel: A 21st-Century Dramatist  
[a John Coffin Trust event]
- 19.45 *Conference dinner*
- Friday 20 November**  
9.30 onwards Registration
- A: Adaptation and Insertion**  
9.30 **Tarcisio Balbo**  
How Handel's Operas End:  
*Catone in Utica* (1732) as Case Study
- 10.05 **John H. Roberts**  
Handel, Jennens and the Advent  
of Scriptural Oratorio
- 10.40 **Ruth Smith**  
'In this Balance seek a Character':  
The Role of 'Il Moderato' in *L'Allegro,*  
*il Penseroso ed il Moderato*
- B: Antiquity and Classicism**  
**Peter Brown**  
'Ombra mai fu': Shades of Greece and  
Rome in Works by Purcell and Handel
- Reinhard Strohm**  
Handel and the Uses of Antiquity
- Robert Ketterer**  
Texts and Contexts of Purcell's *Dioclesian*
- 11.15 *Tea/coffee*
- A: Text-Music Relationships**  
11.45 **Anthony Hicks**  
Quotations and Quotation Marks  
in Handel Wordbooks, especially  
those of Thomas Morell
- 12.20 **Jeffrey Barnouw**  
Poetry into Music: Obstacles and  
Breakthroughs in setting English  
Texts for Purcell and Handel
- 12.55 **Walter Kreyszig**  
The Relationship between Literary  
Text and Musical Text in the annual  
St Caecilia Celebrations in England
- B: Transformations**  
**John Andrews**  
From Congreve to Handel:  
The Development of the  
*Semele* Libretto
- Graham Cummings**  
Metastasio's *Alessandro* to  
Handel's *Poros*: A Change of  
Dramatic Emphasis
- Deborah Rooke**  
Ever-changing Esther: From the  
Biblical Text to Handel's first  
Israelite Oratorio
- 13.30 *Lunch*
- A: St Cecilia**  
14.40 **Bryan White**  
The Rise and Fall of the London  
Cecilian Celebrations, 1683-1700
- 15.15 **Pierre Degott**  
Continuities and Ruptures:  
Purcell and Handel's Cecilian Odes
- B: The 'Semi-Opera Problem'**  
**Wolfgang Hirschmann**  
*The British Enchanters* and George  
Granville's Theory of Opera
- Julia Muller and Frans Muller**  
Umbrage at the Opera:  
London from Purcell to Handel
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15.50 *Tea/coffee*

16.20 **Roger Savage**  
Purcell's Scurvy Texts

*at The Foundling Museum*

18.00 Reception

19.00 Concert by The Avison Ensemble

**Saturday 21 November**

**A: Characters and Contexts**

- 9.15 **Liam Gorry**  
Characterisation in Handel's Oratorios  
in relation to Accompanied Recitatives
- 9.50 **Sarah McCleave**  
The Muting of Handel's Muse; or,  
Deidamia as a Pastoral Figure  
without a Voice
- 10.25 **Matthew Badham**  
'Straight mine eye hath caught new  
pleasures': New Modes of Inward and  
Outward Contemplation in Handel's  
*L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato*

**B: Reception thro' Poetry and Fiction**

- Jean L. Kreiling**  
The Reception History of Handel's  
*Messiah*: Poetic Perspectives
- Annette Landgraf**  
The Role of Handel's Music  
in German Fictional Literature
- Delia da Sousa Correa**  
Handel and Purcell in  
George Eliot's Fiction

11.00 *Tea/coffee*

**A: Texts Lost and Found**

- 11.30 **Matthew Gardner**  
17th-century Literary Classics  
as 18th-century Libretto Subjects:  
Congreve, Dryden and Milton
- 12.05 **Graydon Beeks**  
'O Sing unto the Lord': The Selection  
of Anthem Texts for Cannons
- 12.55 **Olive Baldwin and Thelma Wilson**  
Handel and the Birthday Celebrations  
for Queen Anne in 1711

**B: Religion and Morality**

- Robert Fraser**  
Purcell, the Popish Plot and  
the Politics of Latin
- Mark Burden**  
Henry Purcell and Dissent  
in England, 1660-95
- James Garratt**  
German Manliness and Moral  
Strength: Gervinus's Handel

13.15 *Lunch*

14.15 **Christopher Wilson**

Restoration Shakespeare: Shadwell's *Timon of Athens* and Music

14.50 **Ellen T. Harris**

The Cantata as Diary

15.25 **Panel: Berta Joncus, Zac Ozmo and Vanessa Rogers**

'This glorious approbation of sounds':

Handel, Purcell and London's 18th-century Entertainments

16.30 *Conference ends*

The Programme Committee hopes to mount a concert of Cecilian music on the evening of  
Saturday 21 November. Conference enquiries to: [valerie.james@sas.ac.uk](mailto:valerie.james@sas.ac.uk)



## ETERNAL SOURCE FOR SPECULATION: HANDEL'S BIRTHDAY ODE FOR QUEEN ANNE

In general, Handel, a highly professional musician, kept away from politics in London, while taking full advantage of the patronage available from the court, some of which seems to have been directly promoted by members of the royal family. Evidence of his active political participation is found only once, in the lists for the 1749 Westminster election, when he voted for the Whigs, as would have been expected of a man in his position. For most of the time, his career relied on maintaining favour with a broad spectrum of patrons, crossing party boundaries, and it is therefore not surprising that 'political' readings of his operas and oratorios have been plausible only on a general level, in relation to the intellectual and social background of his time.

There is, however, one period when he seems to have become tangled with British politics: during his first years in London. This was probably unavoidable if he wanted to be accepted by the court and by his potential supporters in the opera house. His situation had an international dimension, because he arrived as an office-holder from the court of Hanover, for which he could be regarded as a diplomatic representative. However, by the time of his return to London in the autumn of 1712 there was a conflict between the interests of Britain and Hanover concerning the resolution of the European war. This interacted with domestic politics in London, as Queen Anne moved away from the Marlborough interest and shifted power towards Tories who supported the current peace negotiations. Effectively, the deal had been done by the beginning of 1713: the Utrecht negotiations were nearing completion, and the result was supported by the Queen and her government. In the first months of 1713 Handel composed three works with direct reference to the Peace: the 'Utrecht' *Te Deum* and *Jubilate*, and 'Eternal Source of Light Divine', a setting of an ode by Ambrose Philips for the Queen's birthday.

The *Te Deum* score was completed on 14 January 1713, and the *Jubilate* probably about a month later.<sup>1</sup> The autograph of 'Eternal Source' is undated, but it was

almost certainly composed between these two works: the Queen's birthday was on 6 February. It has sometimes been suggested that the Ode was performed for the birthday in 1714, but this seems unlikely: its text specifically celebrates Anne 'who brought a lasting peace on earth', and that was no longer topical a year later, when there were other pressing concerns. There is no documentary evidence for the performance of Handel's Ode, but the autograph shows that it at least came near to performance, for he rewrote the solo vocal part of the movement 'Let flocks and herds their fear forget', originally composed for the soprano Jane Barbier, for the Chapel Royal's famous alto Richard Elford.

The Birthday Ode is unusual or anomalous in several ways. Mrs Barbier and Mrs Robinson are named in the autograph, but the inclusion of women soloists in a London court ode was an unusual feature, and this was probably the first such occurrence since Mrs Ayliff had performed in 'Celebrate this Festival', Henry Purcell's Birthday Ode for Queen Mary in 1693.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, while Jane Barbier was certainly a member of the London opera company by February 1713, the participation of Anastasia Robinson is uncertain before January 1714. The provision of court odes was one of the few defined duties of the Master of the Musick and the Poet Laureate, but neither John Eccles nor Nahum Tate had any hand in 'Eternal Source'. In 1713 the records of the Lord Chamberlain's department have a gap in the routine annual payments for court odes.<sup>3</sup> It is remarkable that Handel's 'Utrecht' music was performed at the state Thanksgiving Service for the Peace in July 1713, in preference to the settings of the canticles by Purcell or Croft, so it is rather tantalising that we do not know more about the circumstances under which Handel composed the Ode, or indeed whether it was performed at all.

It is perhaps not surprising that, among the composer's early London works, 'Eternal Source' has received rather disproportionate attention and been examined as a source of possible evidence for the political, social and literary milieu of the time.<sup>4</sup> This has been at the expense of recognition of Handel's remarkable achievement in his musical setting: his near-faultless command of the English language, the liveliness and sensitivity of his vocal writing, the plasticity of his treatment of binary structures, and the variety of the movements, as each one in turn dances

<sup>1</sup> See Donald Burrows, *Handel and the English Chapel Royal* (Oxford, 2005), ch. 4. The completion date has been trimmed away from the autograph of the *Jubilate*.

<sup>2</sup> I thank Olive Baldwin and Thelma Wilson for this reference.

<sup>3</sup> See Olive Baldwin and Thelma Wilson, 'Music in the Birthday Celebrations at Court in the Reign of Queen Anne: A Documentary Calendar', in Michael Burden (ed.), *A Handbook for Studies in 18th-Century English Music*, 19 (2008), pp. 1-24.

<sup>4</sup> Recent articles include James A. Winn, 'Style and Politics in the Philips-Handel Ode for Queen Anne's Birthday, 1713', *Music & Letters*, 89 (2008), pp. 547-61 and Michael Custodis, 'Kunst und Karriere: Georg Friedrich Händels Ode "Eternal Source of Light Divine"', *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft*, 65 (2008), pp. 225-41. According to Winn (p. 548) 'Burrows ... now believes' that the Ode was performed in 1713: at best, my opinion is that it may have been performed, but the only evidence – the non-payment of Eccles and Tate – is negative.



along in its own character yet often also accommodates the same 'chorus' text as the climax. In terms of Handel's personal biography, the significance of the Ode lies in its evidence of his commitment to life in London, whatever the hazard to his position in Hanover (and the foreseeable complications when the Elector succeeded to the British throne). By celebrating the Peace of Utrecht so wholeheartedly, he (unusually) put his head above the political parapet, with the inevitable consequence of dismissal from his Hanover post as he 'entered the Queen's service'.

There are unanswered questions about the subsequent history of the Ode, as well as about the circumstances of its commission and performance. Soon after Handel's first arrival in London, and before his first opera performance there, he appeared at court on the Queen's birthday in 1711, when:

Between One and Two in the Afternoon, was perform'd a fine Consort, being a Dialogue in *Italian*, in Her Majesty's Praise, set to excellent Musick by the famous Mr. *Hendel*, a Retainer to the Court of Hanover, in the Quality of Director of his Electoral Highness's Chapple, and sung by *Cavaliero Nicolini Grimaldi*, and the other Celebrated Voices of the Italian Opera: with which Her Majesty was extremely well pleas'd.<sup>5</sup>

Nothing in the surviving repertory of Handel's music quite matches the description of this 'Italian dialogue'.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps it was lost, but still known of, in 1760, and is the subject of this reference in the list of Handel's works in John Mainwaring's biography: 'Serenatas, [... one of which was for Queen ANNE, and performed at St. James's, but afterwards lost]'.<sup>7</sup>

That has usually been taken to refer to 'Eternal Source', but there is a puzzle. The autograph of the Ode must have belonged to the collection that King George III received from John Christopher Smith junior, yet it is not included in Charles Burney's list of 'Original Manuscripts in the possession of his Majesty' in 1785, although the copy in Sir Watkin Williams Wynn's collection is mentioned.<sup>8</sup> The autograph of the Ode must have been bound into a volume for the shelves of the King's library at the same period as the other Handel

autographs, almost certainly before 1800. The original spine of the volume has been replaced, but the labels have been preserved; they read 'BIRTH / DAY / ODE / FOR / QUEEN / ANN', and 'ORIGIN[AL] / SCORE'.<sup>9</sup> 'Eternal Source' was therefore at no period actually 'lost', though there is the possibility that the autograph originally had an overture that had become separated before the volume was bound. In King George III's library the autograph, which was not as substantial a volume as those for the operas and oratorios, may simply have been overlooked. This could have happened because the volume was mis-shelved away from the main collection, or because the volume was thin (accounting for the short title-lines on the labels), though other volumes of comparable size were included in Burney's tally of anthem autographs. Possibly as a result of a list of Handel's autographs that had been drawn up for Burney's use, King George III or his librarian Frederick Nicolay apparently believed that the Ode was not to be found in the royal collection, and so a new copy was commissioned from a score that had originally been owned by Charles Jennens and been passed to his 'Aylesford' relatives on his death in 1773. Jennens's score is lost, but the associated set of partbooks (with the Ode carrying the title 'Serenade for the Birthday of Queen Anne') survives, mostly now in the Library of Congress at Washington, DC.<sup>10</sup>

Apart from Jennens's manuscripts, there is evidence that the Ode was neither forgotten nor inaccessible in the years immediately following Handel's death. The collection of 'conducting scores' from Handel and his immediate successors, now at the Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Hamburg, includes two copies of the Ode, both of them dating from the early 1760s:<sup>11</sup> the period is fixed by the characteristics of the manuscript paper and by the handwriting style of John Christopher Smith senior, which became distinctly wobbly in his last years (he died in 1763). One score (M C/265) is a fair copy of the Ode as found in Handel's autograph; the other (M C/183) has the same music but a different text, beginning 'My breast a sacred impulse feels'. The two scores are clearly related, in that they follow the same layout of the music on the pages, and must have been

<sup>5</sup> See Burrows, *Handel and the English Chapel Royal*, p. 43.

<sup>6</sup> The only surviving music to come close to the description is the duet movement 'Non più barbaro furore' in the cantata *Echeggiate, festeggiate, numi eterni* (HWV 119), though the reference to a 'dialogue' suggests a preceding recitative.

<sup>7</sup> John Mainwaring, *Memoirs of the Life of the late George Frederic Handel* (London, 1760), p. 155.

<sup>8</sup> Charles Burney, *An Account of the Musical Performances ... in Commemoration of Handel* (London, 1785), pp. 42-6: 'Chronological List of Handel's Works'. For the history of the Handel autographs in the Royal Music Library, see Donald Burrows, 'The Royal Music Library and its Handel Collection', *The Electronic British Library Journal* (2009): [www.bl.uk/eblj/2009articles/article2.html](http://www.bl.uk/eblj/2009articles/article2.html).

<sup>9</sup> Compare these with the labels on the surviving spines, illustrated in Burrows, 'The Royal Music Library'. The original spine may have carried a year-date for the Ode, though this would not necessarily have been reliable. I thank Nicolas Bell (British Library) for locating the labels for the Ode volume.

<sup>10</sup> See John H. Roberts, 'The Aylesford Collection', in Terence Best (ed.), *Handel Collections and their History* (London, 1993), pp. 51-2, 75, 84.

<sup>11</sup> See Hans Dieter Clausen, *Händels Direktionspartituren ('Handexemplare')* (Hamburg, 1972), pp. 180-81.



copied very closely together in time, since they have the same paper types.<sup>12</sup> Almost certainly M C/183 was derived from M C/265 and copied specifically to establish the version with the new text. An inserted leaf at the beginning of M C/183 has the basso continuo part of the overture to *The Occasional Oratorio*, and there are other signs of intended performance, including the names of the singers Frasi and Scott on one of the duet movements.

When I surveyed the Hamburg collection in the 1990s, the motive for the origination of these two scores in the early 1760s was inexplicable, as was the reason for the alternative text. However, an item recently acquired by the Gerald Coke Handel Collection provides an explanation: a printed wordbook for a performance of *Alexander's Feast* 'As Performed at the Theatre-Royal in Covent-Garden', dated 1762.<sup>13</sup> *Alexander's Feast* always posed a practical problem for theatre performance in London, because it was in two acts or parts, while the audience expected a three-act evening; Handel himself eventually solved the problem by combining it with his one-act setting of Dryden's shorter Cecilian Ode, performed as Part Three after *Alexander's Feast*. The 1762 wordbook, however, shows a different arrangement, with something else as Part One, to precede *Alexander's Feast*: 'A Paraphrase of the forty-fifth Psalm, on occasion of the King's Coronation and Marriage; adapted to Mr. Handel's Musick composed for the Birth-day of Queen Anne, in 1714.', which turns out to be 'My breast a sacred impulse feels'. The most likely interpretation of the performing scores, therefore, is that Smith junior planned to perform the Ode as a prelude to *Alexander's Feast*, initially with the original text but then with words appropriate to the situation in 1762. (The attribution of the original Ode to 1714 on the title-page of the wordbook is interesting but, I think, not significant in terms of the accuracy of people's memories and guesses half a century later.)

King George III had acceded to the throne on 25 October 1760, but the coronation in Westminster Abbey did not take place until 22 September 1761; on 8 September 1761 the King had married Princess Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz at St James's Palace. J. C. Smith junior gave annual Lenten oratorio seasons at Covent Garden, and so the 1762 series was the first opportunity for the inclusion in his programme of an item to celebrate these events. The celebration may seem somewhat delayed, but George II's reign had been long (and, in his later years, rather colourless), so the sense of a new beginning with a younger court lasted for some years into the new reign. This also explains why, for a revival of *The Occasional Oratorio* in 1763, Smith inserted the duet 'Let Caesar and Urania live' from Henry Purcell's 1687 birthday ode for King James II.

As with the original history of Handel's Ode, there

must be some doubt as to whether the scheme for the inclusion of the retexted Ode, as printed in the 1762 word-book for *Alexander's Feast*, ever came to performance, though the title-page of the copy carries an owner's signature, suggesting that this was not a printer's proof. In 1762 *Alexander's Feast* was performed by Smith and Stanley at Covent Garden on 3 and 24 March,<sup>14</sup> but the press advertisements name 'Coronation Anthems' as the accompanying music, not the retexted Ode.<sup>15</sup> It looks as if the Ode had a history of bad luck when it came to performance, but the piece was not forgotten. Handel himself re-used its music in subsequent works: the autograph even includes an amendment in his hand relating to the use of one aria (to a new text) in *Deborah*.<sup>16</sup> After his death the Ode was not physically 'lost' (as suggested by one interpretation of the reference in Mainwaring's *Memoirs*), and there was even a plan to revive it when circumstances at court encouraged a comparable, but more public, celebration.

Donald Burrows

<sup>12</sup> Both volumes have paper with watermark type F1 (M C/265 also has F2c) and twenty-stave music pages ruled with four-stave rastra, total span 68.5 mm.

<sup>13</sup> This was one of a group of librettos in Lot 39 at Sotheby's music sale in London on 3 December 2008.

<sup>14</sup> Neither date was close to the anniversary of the birth of the King or Queen.

<sup>15</sup> I thank Helen Green for checking the relevant newspaper advertisements.

<sup>16</sup> The relevant page is reproduced in facsimile on p. x of Walther Siegmund-Schultze's edition of the Ode: Hallische Händel-Ausgabe (HHA), I/6 (1962).

## GERMAN HANDEL FESTIVALS SUMMER 2009

### GÖTTINGEN

Much fuss was made in advance, not least by the Göttingen Händel-Festspiele itself, about Doris Dörrie's staging of *Admeto*. Supposedly in the style of a Japanese Noh play (a highly stylized and conventional form of drama – geddit? – dating from the fourteenth century), with Japanese dancers choreographed and led by butoh dancer Tadashi Endo (who, as luck would have it, is based in Göttingen), this was reputed to be a radically daring and new approach to staging Handel.

Don't believe a word of it! In the event, it was the usual conceited *Regietheater*, with insensitive cuts to the score (often against the grain of the drama), cheap on-stage gags for comic effect in scenes that do not warrant such treatment (do dancers dressed as sheep really need to reinforce the message by saying 'baaaah!' during the



pastoral music that introduces Antigona for the first time?), and a disappointing lack of feeling for the musico-dramatic aesthetics presented by Handel's setting of an old Venetian libretto. Dörrie is a popular author and respected film-maker in Germany who has also produced later operas (notably Mozart's *La finta giardiniera* for the 2006 Salzburg Festival), but her handling of characterization and text left much to be desired – although she did create some highly effective visual ideas in the more tragic and serious set pieces, such as Admeto's response to the tormenting Furies in the opening scene, a beautiful yet startling use of shadows in Alceste's suicide scene, and a vivid staging of Alceste being tormented in Hades prior to her rescue by Ercole.

A mixed bag of good ideas, undermined by mishandling of the text and crass pantomime comedy at the wrong moments, made this seemingly original production resemble the Handel productions that we are used to seeing elsewhere. Cuzzoni's aria at the end of Act I was brutally cut, leaving David Bates to stumble feebly through Trasimede's hunting aria and thus conclude the act. It is a pity that the final scene, in which Trasimede waits in the wings for a chance to assassinate Admeto, was hammed up for laughs.

Some of the singing in this production was surprisingly bad, although Tim Mead (as Admeto), Kirsten Blaise (Antigona) and William Berger (Ercole) were impressive. Thankfully, Nicholas McGegan's direction of his excellent Festspiele-Orchester Göttingen was typically excellent. If only their contribution had been hooked to a stronger production. It is understandable that Göttingen does not want to become stereotyped for presenting baroque-style stagings, but during my nine years of attending the festival such a label could be applied to only three of the productions; the other six have been modern. It is sincerely to be hoped that the clumsy treatment of Handel's score, evident in *Admeto*, is not a sign of things to come. Perhaps it did not help British members of the audience that Tadashi Endo's ghostly dancer, shadowing Alceste throughout, looked much like the mad woman in *Up Pompeii*. If stage directors wilfully mix up cultural references, they must take the consequences if part of their audience finds it hard to take the pretentious results seriously. And are we not supposed to take *opera seria* seriously?

McGegan and his orchestra's colourful performance of *Alexander's Feast*, with fine solo singing from the American tenor Tom Cooley and Canadian soprano Dominique Labelle, was by far the finest artistic triumph of the festival. The NDR Choir looked as if they were enjoying themselves, and this transmitted itself into their music-making (last year in *Samson* they were glum, which did likewise). McGegan's direction was flawless, with superb awareness of textures and rhythms. The bass, Wolf Matthias Friedrich, was a little blustery

and exaggerated, but all in all this was an outstanding performance.

It was not a surprise that this year's anniversary festival featured plenty of extra events, although it was notable that there were fewer afternoon and evening concerts by renowned international groups than in the past. The global economic crisis, combined with Hanoverian politics, gave this year's offerings a slightly more parochial flavour. However, the Stadtkantorei Göttingen and the Göttinger Barock-Orchester, conducted by Bernd Eberhard, gave an excellent performance of Haydn's *Theresienmesse* (of this year's four big anniversary composers only Purcell was rather under-represented in the festival). The local choir and orchestra have improved tremendously over the last decade, but the first-half performance of *Dixit Dominus* was ragged in places, the large choir being unable to maintain coherence in the faster fugal passages. There were fine solo contributions from Robin Blaze, Virgin Hartinger (tenor), and this year's Handel Singing Prize winner Ruby Hughes (soprano).

I did not attend an afternoon concert by the Argentinian countertenor Franco Fagioli of arias by Handel and Hasse but am reliably informed that his singing was particularly convincing, stylish and assured. He is, apparently, an operatic countertenor of rare intelligence and integrity. At the extreme opposite of such sobriety and taste was Leipzig soprano Simone Kermes, whose afternoon concert in the university's elegant ceremonial hall was a tempestuous riot. Deliberately extreme in all she does, Kermes's punchy performance of arias from early eighteenth-century Naples (Vinci, Pergolesi, Porpora, Leo, Hasse and more) had the peculiar atmosphere of a rock concert juxtaposed with the red carpet glitz of an Oscar ceremony. She likes to think of herself as a baroque diva equivalent of Freddie Mercury, and, on this evidence, she surely succeeds in the endeavour. Singing all these difficult arias from memory, and communicating fully with both her audience and her feisty Italian band *Le Musiche Nove*, she gave us a startling and exciting experience. Often, however, the performance was far too extreme to allow important elements in the music to be projected: there was not much in the way of elegance or judicious pacing. Most of the audience loved it, but some were bemused. It is fair to observe that in slower and gentler arias Kermes was sensational (in a good way), and it was lovely to hear such a radiant performance of Bononcini's 'Ombra mai fu'. At the very least, the musicologist Claudio Osele deserves enormous credit for putting together such a well-researched programme and coaching the ensemble in rehearsal (although he did not direct the performance).

It was fascinating to compare this to the next day's afternoon concert by Alan Curtis and *Il Complesso Barocco*, with whom Kermes used to appear regularly. Based on the theme 'Love, Loss and Longing', the



performances of arias and duets from *Faramondo*, *Alcina*, *Ariodante* and *Amadigi* were pedestrian, and they were not helped by interminable readings by Donna Leon from her latest book, which had nothing to do with the music and broke up any sense of artistic purpose to the proceedings.

The festival programme came to an end with a performance of *Israel in Egypt* by Musica Alta Ripa. It is a shame that the festival had not made clear that this was the much-maligned 1756 version of the work: quite a lot of people were confused when Part 1 proceeded to offer all kinds of music that they did not expect. A gala concert, conducted by McGegan, featured Haydn's *The Storm*, Cherubini's Cantata on the Death of Haydn (written, infamously, when a false rumour of the elderly composer's death reached Paris) and Mendelssohn's arrangement of the 'Dettingen' Te Deum. Poor Purcell didn't get a look in, but the encore (the 'Hallelujah' chorus) was rapturously received by the audience.

**David Vickers**

## **HALLE**

The theme of the festival was 'Handel the European', and the patrons in this celebratory year were the Queen and the German President Horst Köhler. Her Majesty was represented by the British ambassador, Sir Michael Arthur, who made a witty and very well-received speech at the opening ceremony in the Georg-Friedrich-Händel-Halle. The Handel House has undergone a renovation, with a completely new exhibition that was opened as part of the introductory proceedings, and there is a new guidebook to the displays.

After meetings of the Editorial Board of the HHA and of the management committee of the Händel-Gesellschaft, the festival opened with the 'Festakt', which traditionally comprises speeches and music. This year the music consisted of excerpts from *The Occasional Oratorio*, of which Merlin Channon's edition for the HHA is now in production. It was performed by the usual forces, the Händelfestspiel chorus and orchestra, conducted by Christopher Moulds. It was well played and sung, with reasonable English diction from the singers, although the acoustics of the building were, as always, somewhat unfriendly to the clarity of the sound.

Because 2009 is a special year for Handel, the programme was even more crowded than usual, so it was impossible to attend more than a small proportion of the concerts on offer. The 1718 *Acis and Galatea* in the Konzerthalle was given an old-fashioned performance under Frank-Steffen Elster, with delayed cadences and long pauses between movements, but the soloists were good (with clear diction), the boys of the Stadtsingechor sang well, and the orchestral playing was fine.

The new opera production was *Floridante*, a work not on the often-performed list but a fine one, nevertheless, and well worth a hearing. It was given from Hans Dieter

Clausen's recent HHA edition, with the Festpielorchester, conducted again by Christopher Moulds. The playing and singing were excellent, with well-judged tempi and good pacing of the drama.

And so to the production, directed by Vincent Boussard. As we took our seats, we witnessed on stage a number of people eating a meal, sitting round a large oval-shaped glass table, waited on by a team of servants. Behind them was a series of mirrors that reflected not only them but the orchestra in its pit and the first few rows of the audience. A mirror of ourselves, perhaps? Some profound philosophical or psychological significance that your dim-witted correspondent could not interpret? Who knows? The orchestra played the overture, the people finished their meal, and the opera began. By this time, some of us were groaning inwardly with the usual 'Oh not again' syndrome.

However, things got better. Although we could see the orchestra and ourselves in the mirrors, the action, when it developed, was straightforward and without fussy gimmicks. The table served a number of purposes: people lay on it and were suitably attacked, caressed and generally harassed, and in Act II it was upended and became another mirror. One feature was an all-time first: some of the singers, in mid-aria, kissed the addressee of their amorous attentions while singing, and so performed several notes and syllables with their mouths full, as it were. Not an idea to be repeated too often, I felt. However, compared with some recent productions in which what the Germans call the 'Regie' – the production – had been horrendously absurd, this one worked quite well. The action never impeded the flow of the drama or the music, nor were there tiresome extras doing silly things to keep the minds of the audience away from tedious da capos. So a success: one came away charmed with the excellence of the piece.

The next concert was of excerpts from oratorios, given in the vast spaces of the Marktkirche by two distinguished soloists (the soprano Nuria Rial and the countertenor Lawrence Zazzo), the Vocalconsort Berlin and the Kammerorchester Basel under another English conductor, Paul Goodwin. There were items from *Samson* (including some unpublished material that will appear in Clausen's HHA edition), *Belshazzar*, *Messiah*, *Theodora*, *Alexander Balus* and *Solomon*, with some movements from the *Concerti grossi*, op. 3. The performances were excellent and entertaining, although with some too-fast tempi for my taste.

A sell-out concert of instrumental music was given in the cathedral by Le Concert des Nations, directed by the veteran Jordi Savall, who was awarded this year's Handel prize. Billed as 'Water and Fire', the programme included instrumental music by Purcell (from *The Fairy Queen*) and Handel (the so-called second and third *Water Music* suites, the *Fireworks Music* and the *Concerto grosso* in G minor, op. 6 no. 6). It was all very loud, very fast and very brassy, and greeted with almost hysterical acclaim by the audience, who would not let the players go and so had



about half-an-hour's-worth of encores, which I thought completely unmerited. Even the performers seemed desperate to find enough items. I gave up in the end and went to a small reception in the charming garden of the cathedral administration.

A visit to Halle is not complete without a trip to the ravishing spa village of Bad-Lauchstädt and the exquisite theatre built there by Goethe in 1802. The offering was *Serse*, performed by our old friends the Lautten Compagny Berlin under Wolfgang Katschner. The playing and singing were good, but the whole thing was too hard-driven and insensitive, with some silly inauthentic recorder solos. The action on stage was too clowning by half, even allowing that this is a comic opera, and there was the unfunniest Elviro I have ever seen.

All this might have been tolerable, but the tiresome and childish habit of giving 'contemporary relevance' was here at its worst. A video played at the back of the stage throughout, showing real nasties: great white sharks, destruction by dinosaurs, clips of Bill Clinton and J. F. Kennedy, presumably underlining the theme of the sexual peccadilloes of heads of state. The production was not especially anti-American, since the Iranian leader also was shown, and the whole thing ended with a nuclear explosion. One can only grind one's teeth in fury at such treatment of a masterpiece. The culprits were the director André Bückner and the video-master Frank Vetter. Who do these people think they are?

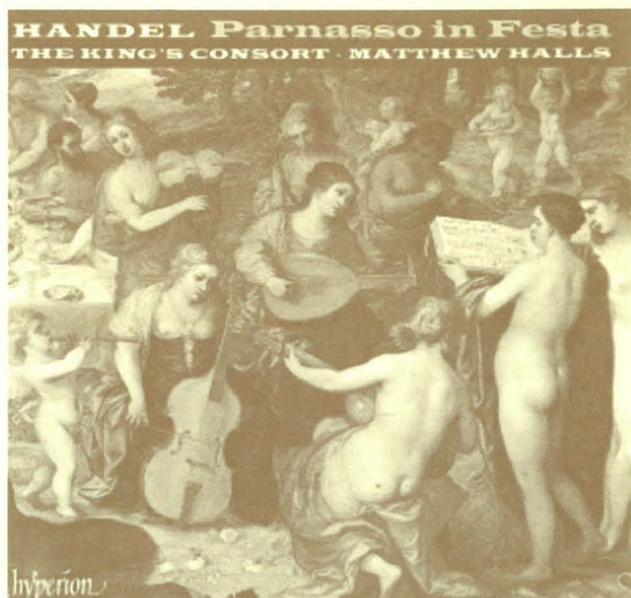
The last concert that I was able to attend was given in the Konzerthalle by the distinguished English countertenor Robin Blaze, accompanied by Florilegium, a chamber group led by Ashley Solomon on flute and recorder. There were lively concertos by Vivaldi and Telemann, solo cantatas by Handel and Vivaldi, and, in the second half, a substantial chunk of Purcell – several chaconnes, including the famous one in G minor, and three arias. I

was sitting at the back of this vast hall (originally a church), so the sound was not very strong. Blaze sang superbly, of course, but the programme was in my view not well chosen for variety and I even began to grow weary of chaconnes. Sorry, Henry, I know that's sacrilege! Other works performed during the festival were *Messiah*, *Ariodante* (a revival of last year's production), *Israel in Egypt*, *Alcina*, *Belshazzar* and *Theodora*, and some attention was paid to Haydn and Mendelssohn, fellow-commemoratees this year.

The scholarly conference was on a much larger scale than usual, again because of the special anniversary. It lasted three full days, with parallel sessions running concurrently in two locations – the concert room of the Handel House and a room in the adjacent Music Faculty of the University. There was even an introductory session in the evening before it began. Papers were read by Handel Institute members Reinhard Strohm ('Händel und der Diskurs der Moderne'), Donald Burrows ('Bringing Europe to Britain: Handel's first Decade in London'), Colin Timms ('Perspectives on *Theodora*') and Ruth Smith ('Milton moderated: *Il Moderato* and its relation to *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*'); by two of our American colleagues (John Roberts and Graydon Beeks); by two other British scholars (Michael Talbot and Matthew Gardner), and by many of 'the great and the good' of world Handel scholars. A vast range of study was presented, and the overall quality was high.

Once again we must congratulate the organisers of this most extensive of all Handel festivals. Even the unusually cool and damp weather did not spoil it: 'englisches Wetter', muttered some German colleagues, perhaps suggesting a new slant on the Anglo-German nexus brought about by GFH.

Terence Best



Hyperion CDA67701/2

## THE STANLEY SADIE HANDEL RECORDING PRIZE 2009

### PARNASSO IN FESTA

|          |                                  |
|----------|----------------------------------|
| Apollo   | Diana Moore <i>mezzo-soprano</i> |
| Clio     | Carolyn Sampson <i>soprano</i>   |
| Orfeo    | Lucy Crowe <i>soprano</i>        |
| Calliope | Rebecca Outram <i>soprano</i>    |
| Clori    | Ruth Clegg <i>alto</i>           |
| Euterpe  | Diana Moore <i>mezzo-soprano</i> |
| Marte    | Peter Harvey <i>bass</i>         |

The King's Consort *period instruments*  
Matthew Halls *direction*



This year the panel of judges is delighted to congratulate Matthew Halls, the King's Consort and Hyperion Records upon the award of first prize for their magnificent world-première recording of Handel's serenata *Parnasso in festa*. The panel was impressed that this unfairly ignored or dismissed work had at last received international exposure and advocacy thanks to Hyperion's courage to promote neglected repertoire. The piece emerges from this recording as an exciting, imaginative and enchanting masterpiece. Several of the judges rejoiced that Matthew Halls had done a splendid job in using serious research to inform a delightful performance, at the helm of a revitalised King's Consort. In particular, the performance has plenty of expertly judged contrast between excitement, tenderness and pathos, with a remarkable variety of colours and sonorities in the orchestral and choral contributions and excellent singing from the soloists, in particular Lucy Crowe and Carolyn Sampson. This captivating performance of *Parnasso in festa* shows us an important new aspect of Handel's vast output. We hope that its success will encourage Matthew Halls and his musicians – now working under the new name of the Retrospect Ensemble – to continue exploring baroque vocal music. We also congratulate The King's Consort and Hyperion for yet another outstanding contribution to their Handel discography.

The panel of judges also congratulates this year's close runner-up: *Aminta e Fillide* by La Risonanza, directed by Fabio Bonizzoni (Glossa). In another year this enchanting performance of the early Roman cantata might comfortably have won first prize; the panel gives a special commendation to La Risonanza for their lovingly prepared series of Handel's Italian cantatas with instruments. We also highly commend three other recordings that figured very highly in this year's voting. A painstakingly researched edition of the original Cannons version of *Acis and Galatea* is superbly performed by the Dunedin Consort & Players, beautifully paced by John Butt (Linn). The Sixteen, conducted by Harry Christophers, delivers a consistently fine account of *Messiah* (Coro) that far surpasses their previous recording of the oratorio made in the late 1980s. Last, but not least, the vivid aria recital *Furore* shows Joyce DiDonato's outstanding qualities as a dramatic and passionate Handel singer, with excellent support from Christophe Rousset's Les Talens Lyriques (Virgin). The panel hopes that all those nominated for this year's prize will be encouraged to continue producing fresh insights into Handel's music.

The Stanley Sadie Handel Recording Prize is an annual award given to a distinctive new recording of Handel's music, chosen by an invited panel of scholars and journalists each of whom possesses a special and informed interest in Handel's music. One of the Prize's founder panel members was the scholar, author and critic Stanley Sadie, in whose memory it was renamed in 2005 (it was originally called the International Handel Recording Prize). We hope that this prize is warmly accepted as an appropriate tribute to Stanley's unusual ease in mingling journalism and scholarship. The winner is carefully selected from a list of all the new recordings of Handel's music released during the previous calendar year.\* The winning recording must satisfy

tough criteria, combining fine interpretative quality with a penetrating or valuable insight into Handel's genius, so that the Prize is an indication both of a recording's quality and of its significance for our knowledge of the composer. This year's judges were:

Ivan A. Alexandre (*Diapason* and *Le Nouvel Observateur* – Paris)  
Nicholas Anderson (Producer and writer, *BBC Music Magazine* – Taunton)  
Sandra Bowdler (Opera critic – Perth, Australia)  
Hugh Canning (*The Sunday Times*, *International Record Review* – London)  
Colin Coleman (Librarian, *Gerald Coke Handel Collection*, *The Foundling Museum* – London)  
Mikhail Fikhtengoltz (Handel scholar and Arts Administrator – Moscow)  
Matthew Gardner (Handel scholar, *Ruprecht-Karls-Universität* – Heidelberg)  
Philippe Gelinaud (Handel scholar, *Opéra Magazine* – Paris)  
Lindsay Kemp (*Lufthansa Festival of Baroque Music*, *BBC Radio 3*, *Gramophone* – London)  
Tess Knighton (Editor, *Early Music* – Cambridge)  
Benedikt Poensgen (*Göttingen Händel-Festspiele* – Göttingen)  
Christopher Purvis (President, *Handel House Museum* – London)  
Kimiko Shimoda (The Record *Geijutsu* – Kyoto)  
David Vickers (Handel scholar, *Gramophone*, *GFHandel.org* – Huddersfield)  
Carlo Vitali (Musicologist, *Amadeus*, *Opera Now*, *Musical America*)

\* This year a live recording of *Orlando* featuring the Festspiele-Orchester Göttingen, conducted by Nicholas McGegan, was not eligible for consideration, because it is available only to members of the Göttinger Händel-Gesellschaft.

## HANDEL'S OPERAS 1704-1726

by Winton Dean and John Merrill Knapp

The Boydell Press, September 2009  
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The Boydell Press is pleased to announce a reprint, by popular demand, of the first volume in this monumental study of Handel's operas. Dean and Knapp devote a chapter to each of the composer's first seventeen operas, offering a full synopsis and study of the libretto, extensive discussion of the music, a performance history, and a comparison of the different versions of the opera. In addition there are general chapters on the historical and stylistic context of Handel's operatic career to 1726, and a number of Appendices. For further information, see: [www.boydell.co.uk/43835258.HTM](http://www.boydell.co.uk/43835258.HTM).

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