


 THE HANDEL INSTITUTE

NEWSLETTER

This issue is devoted to reviews of recent Festival performances, and to progress reports on two important projects in which the Insti-

tute is involved, the filming of the Malmesbury Collection and the development of Handel's London house. There is also encouraging news about the HHA.

A PLAN FOR HANDEL'S HOUSE

The house at 25 Brook Street, Mayfair, just along from Claridges, presents a sad spectacle. With heating and mains electricity switched off, floorboards hazardously raised to expose ancient joints and not-so-ancient rjs's, it is difficult to imagine the house either as Handel knew it or as it might look as a museum. It is scandalous that a Grade I Listed Building, the house where Handel lived from 1723, wrote *Messiah* and died in 1759, should have been allowed to fall into such a sorry state, parts of it crudely altered beyond anything that its first occupant would recognize.

Yet it does give glimpses of past glory, of how Handel lived and worked in conditions which will be immediately familiar, for 25 Brook Street is like 95 percent of the dwellings in London, Georgian or later: a rather dark terraced house, two or three rooms deep, some of which have been knocked together in an attempt to give the illusion of spaciousness. The one original feature, a creaking wooden staircase with carved tread ends and elegant turned balusters, is almost too grand for a house of this size. The least changed part of the building is the second floor. Facing the street is Handel's large, airy bedchamber, now somewhat narrowed by the addition of a typical boxroom at the top of the stairs. At the back of this storey is a small, cosy sitting room, with its original fireplace angled away from the party wall. A single window overlooks the maze of yards, outbuildings and defunct stables, all of which are to be demolished in the redevelopment scheme. This room is virtually identical in layout to the one which was originally beneath it, now much altered, where Handel is said to have composed.

The history of No. 25 Brook Street has been admirably documented in an article by John Greenacombe in the *London Topographical Record*, Vol. 25

(1985). As he discovered, the house and the four adjoining it were built in 1721-3 by George Barnes on the Conduit Mead estate, land leased from the Corporation of the City of London, which still owns the site. Handel did not purchase the house, but rented it for the not unsubstantial sum of £50 or 60 per annum. The front door was at the right, with railings guarding a well which let light into the basement kitchen. Front and back parlours occupied the ground floor. The large room at the front on the first floor was the heart of Handel's house: here he entertained, dined and conducted rehearsals. And it was presumably from the window that in 1723 he threatened to throw the "véritable Diabesse" Cuzzoni. The second floor was much as it is today, the third floor being a garret for servants and storage.

The alterations and improvements which Handel's house underwent in the first 100 years or so after his death are typical of those visited on most Georgian dwellings in London and elsewhere. The water closets at the back were replaced by long, narrow rooms with bowed walls and large windows facing the house next door to the west. The dining room was removed to the ground floor nearer the kitchen, and the garret with its dormers was replaced by a full attic storey. Despite these changes, the house still retained its distinctive Georgian character in the 1880s. And as late as 1893 the musical antiquary W.H. Cummings claims to have seen a lead cistern embossed "1721. G.F.H.", though why this personalized bit of plumbing should have predated Handel's occupancy by two years is unclear.

Vandalism was committed when the house was transferred to commercial tenancy in 1905: an unsightly two-storey shop-front destroyed the original frontage, though the first-floor elevation was restored in 1954; Handel's front door was moved from the west to the



east side; the ground floor was gutted and reconfigured, though some of the original panelling may have been reused. Later, the upper three storeys were sealed off from the basement and ground floor and provided with a separate, shabby entrance set back from the street and to the right of a large, wrap-around window, which until recently displayed up-market antiques.

How can this dilapidated and much-abused house be transformed into a museum? The Handel House Association faces the difficult task of trying to square the interests of English Heritage, Westminster City Council and Neale House Investments, the developers of the Bond Street Arcades. (The new shopping area will occupy most of the block bounded by Brook Street, Bond Street, Grosvenor Street and Avery Row.) English Heritage are of the opinion that even a Grade I building is the sum of its parts as they have accrued over the years. No. 25 Brook Street is listed because Handel lived there, not for any special architectural merit, apart from the staircase and some of the eighteenth-century panelling on the ground floor, features which would not, on past experience, be enough to save it from determined developers exploiting the present government's *laissez-faire*. Yet English Heritage are as much concerned to preserve the first-

floor Edwardian panelling as Handel's staircase. Neale House, whilst having pledged to help establish and maintain a Handel museum as a part of the new shopping precincts, face overwhelming commercial pressure to retain the ground floor as a shop. All Handelians must applaud this generous rent-free offer of the upper three floors.

The Handel House Association Limited is therefore having to plan a museum of international importance over what may end up as a Gucci leather goods shop. It is hoped to create an exhibition of Handel artefacts, manuscripts, paintings and materials illustrating his London career, as well as a library and offices in appropriate surroundings and without resorting to Disney-like fakery. The HHAL is seeking permission from the Westminster City Council Department of Planning and Transportation to make one major alteration, having already obtained agreement in principle from the developers and English Heritage: to construct a new façade to match the original details of the house. A shop window and entrance will need to be retained at the left, but the museum entrance will be through a door in the position of Handel's original — flush with the pavement. (Compare the present front elevation with the HHAL plan, *ill. 1 and 2.*)

A comparison of the original 1723 first-floor plan (as reconstructed by Greenacombe) with that proposed by HHAL architect Stephen Fuller will give some idea how this part of the house has been altered and how the HHAL proposes to make use of Handel's former dining room and study, which will retain their present Edwardian panelling (see *ill. 3 and 4*). The second floor will include two further exhibition areas and the museum office, the third floor, a library and further offices.

The obstacles and uncertainties facing the Handel museum are obvious. We might also recall that an attempt to raise public funds to buy the house in 1938 failed miserably. But there is tremendous potential here, and much goodwill has been shown on all sides. The Handel museum would be the only institution in London devoted to a composer and, apart from Elgar's house in Broadheath, the only musical shrine of international importance in Great Britain. Carefully planned and executed, and with the eventual acquisition or loan of Handel collections now scattered around England, it could rival the Beethoven House in Bonn or the Mozart House in Salzburg. To Handelians, who are by definition lovers of eighteenth-century history, it must seem ironic that all this may arise

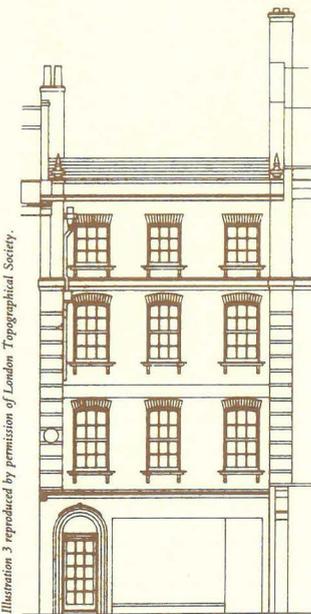


Illustration 1

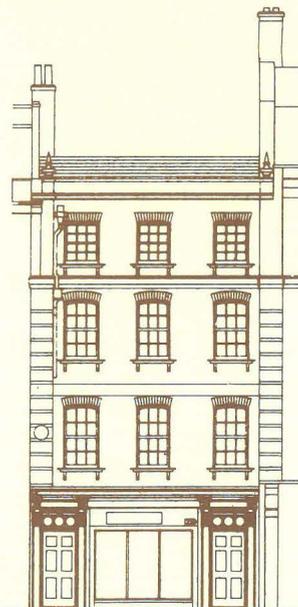


Illustration 2

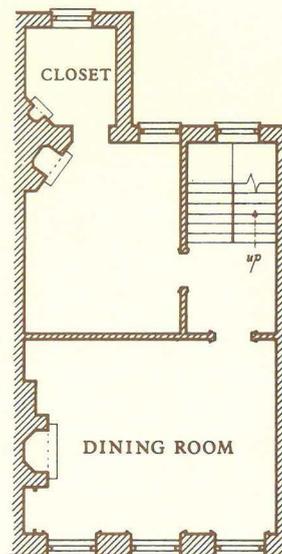


Illustration 3

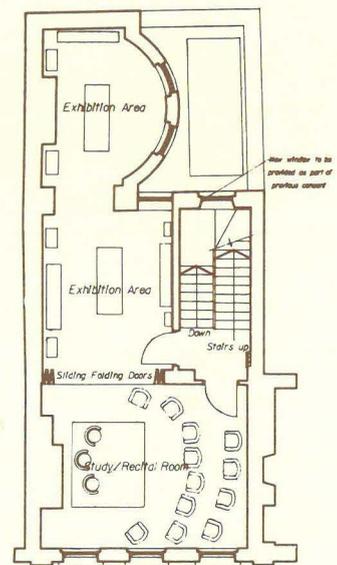


Illustration 4

Illustration 3 reproduced by permission of London Topographical Society.



from the demolition of a large part of eighteenth-century Mayfair. But despite any mixed feelings, even misgivings, this is an opportunity that must not be lost.

Curtis Price

Riccardo Primo at Covent Garden

Until this year there has been only one production of *Riccardo Primo* in London since Handel's time, the one given by Charles Farncombe and the Handel Opera Society in 1964 with the tenor Richard Lewis in a transposed title-role. It was good, therefore, to have the opportunity to hear it again on 14th July, in a performance put on as part of Lina Lalandi's English Bach Festival; especially since it was that rare event, a Handel opera at Covent Garden. With an eye to the future, a significant feature of the evening was that the house was practically full.

One's appetite was whetted by advance publicity which promised that the performance was being given with "original designs"; there may have been some truth in this as far as the costumes were concerned — they were superb — but we did not have any attempt at reproducing the scenery described in the libretto and the score, so that much of the sumptuousness of the original staging was lost: two medieval pavilions of the kind shown in early battle-paintings sufficed to indicate the respective locations of the Cypriots and Richard's crusaders. Tom Hawke's production was most pleasing to a reviewer wearied by some recent Handel opera productions in Germany in which singers were never allowed to stand still either in ritornellos or while singing, but were made to throw each other about, hurl things at one another, or hide under sheets or cushions; here the movements and gestures were unfussy, a skilful blend of the naturalistic and the stylised, which never hindered the dramatic and emotional power of the music nor, as so often happens, contradicted it. One hopes that those in the audience who may never have seen a Handel opera before came away

convinced that here is an art-form which works perfectly well when properly presented.

Marc Minkowski directed a lively and well-paced performance, showing that he is a fine Handel conductor, and he drew stylish playing from the English Bach Festival Baroque Orchestra. The singing was of variable quality: the two women, Della Jones in the Faustina role of Pulcheria, and Marilyn Hill Smith in the Cuzzoni part of Costanza, were the best, showing a fine sense of Handelian style, and a sensible approach to ornamentation — how this aspect of Handel performance has improved over recent years! The greatest disappointment was the Riccardo of Paul Esswood, whose voice seemed unable to fill the large theatre with sufficient power and authority to be convincing; in a smaller theatre in Halle a month before he had given a fine and compelling performance as Admeto. Donald Maxwell gave powerful characterisation to the part of the usurper Isacio, with an admirably clear delivery of the words — a virtue which infused the whole performance; as Oronte, Yaacov Zamir's counter-tenor voice had problems in focussing in the different registers, with bizarre results at times.

Riccardo may not be one of the great Handel operas, but the chance to renew acquaintance with it was very welcome.

Terence Best

40th Händelfestspiele in Halle, June 1991

This year's festival offered six operas and three oratorios as well as a number of concerts covering music of several centuries. As usual there were inevitable clashes between events; but it was bad planning to present two of the three staged Handel operas, *Admeto* from Karlsruhe and *Amadigi* from Munich, on the same evening. As it happened the third opera, a revival of last year's *Tamerlano*, had to be cancelled owing to the illness of the tenor (the substitute, a truncated concert performance of

Rinaldo without Argante, was raised above the ordinary by Annette Markert's singing of the title role), so that I was only able to see one of Handel's operas in the theatre. Hoping for illuminating comparisons with the recent very fine performances in Cambridge, I made the mistake of choosing *Amadigi*. The production, by a company with the ominous title BIG BANG (*sic*), was a disaster and should never have been admitted to a serious festival. The intention seems to have been to send up the convention and/or the opera; no attempt was made to view it consistently on any level. The score was a jumble of all three acts, comprising 19 out of 32 numbers in no sort of order, together with four arias from other operas (two from *Giulio Cesare*). Much of the recitative was replaced by two speaking commentators in extravagant pantomime garb, who manipulated the characters like puppets. The singers were encouraged to indulge in tedious buffoonery during the most expressive arias. Dardano was played as a circus clown, who at various points, including his appearance as a ghost, ostentatiously read a newspaper with his back to the audience. There was no attempt to use the facilities of the Bad Lauchstädt theatre, which dates from 1802 and is admirably equipped for Baroque staging — except that Melissa disappeared through a trap instead of committing suicide. The musical performance was little better; *Amadigi* (attired in a bow-tie and a straw hat) was sung by a baritone, several arias were emasculated, and the scoring was altered.

Homage was paid to Mozart with a new production of *La clemenza di Tito*, also at Bad Lauchstädt, and a performance of his version of *Messiah* which I could not hear. (It was attended by the German and British Foreign Secretaries, and was so advertised that one of the British security guards was heard to remark that he had always thought *Messiah* was by Handel.) *Tito* was given with gorgeous eighteenth-century costumes and very well sung, notably by Annette Markert as Sextus, though



even in this opera the producer, besides devising much superfluous action, could not resist the temptation to play the fool with a bottle of Schnapps during one of the trios. Since this was the opera with which the theatre opened in 1802, it was preceded by the one-act prologue written for that occasion by Goethe.

The concert performances of the dramatic works were much more rewarding than might have been expected. *Theodora* (in English) opened the proceedings at the University Aula, conducted in lively style by Christian Kluttig. There was some good singing by the soloists, especially the counter-tenor Axel Köhler (Didymus), Lioba Braun (Irene) and Tomas Möwes (Valens); but the most memorable feature was the superb performance of the choruses by a group from Leipzig (Favorit-und Capell-Chor) only thirteen strong, who delivered a full-blooded attack and a volume of sound of which Huddersfield might have been proud. The only serious blemish was a dreadfully inappropriate organ accompaniment which brought "Angels ever bright and fair" heavily down to earth.

Agrippina and *Rodelinda* received intensely dramatic performances that clamoured for stage action to carry them to the highest level. *Agrippina* was in fact the first outing of a performance destined for the Göttingen theatre in the following week, and was played with a good deal of gesture and movement. This marvellously witty opera sprang to life under the dynamic conducting of Nicholas McGegan with an excellent cast in which Sally Bradshaw (Agrippina), Wendy Hill (Nerone), Drew Minter (Ottone) and Nicolas Isherwood (Claudio) were outstanding. Two arias were cut and a number shortened — it is a long opera, but will be given complete in a recording by the same forces to be issued later this year.

Rodelinda, performed last year at Göttingen though not on the stage, was no less successful. Michael Schneider conducted La Stagione Frankfurt with an admirable feeling for line in individual arias and for continuity over

the opera as a whole. His one miscalculation was the substitution of a single flute for Handel's violins in Eduige's Act III aria; Handel's ear for scoring was so acute that the change was instantly perceptible. Cuts were slight (one dispensable aria omitted, two shortened), and we heard perhaps the first modern performance of the orchestral coda to Grimoaldo's great accompanied recitative "Fatto inferno", discovered recently in the Malmesbury copy. This was another fine cast: Barbara Schlick (Rodelinda), the counter-tenor David Cordier (Bertarido), Christoph Prégardien (Grimoaldo) and Gotthold Schwarz (Garibaldo) not only sang well but brought the characters strongly to life by acting with the voice. Concert performances of operas are seldom so satisfying.

Winton Dean

Winton's modesty does not allow him to reveal that one of the most remarkable events of this year's Festival was that he swore in German — the only time he is known to have done so: it happened when I asked him innocently what he thought of the *Amadigi* production.

Events which I attended when Winton was elsewhere were the opening concert, *Admeto*, and a staged performance of two of Handel's Italian cantatas. The opening concert began with the Concerto a due cori HWV 334, and ended with two movements of HWV 333; these were robust and uninhibited accounts by the Händelfestspiel-orchester, totally suited to the character of these works. The American counter-tenor Jeffrey Gall, replacing the advertised René Jacobs, sang arias from *Orlando* and *Flavio*, and the centrepiece was the D minor organ concerto Op 7 no 4, with Michael Schönheit as soloist. It was a lively effort, but some of the *ad libitum* passages in the second movement seemed to be reminding us that this year's festival had Mozart in mind as well as Handel: how easy it is to go stylistically astray at these moments.

Admeto saw a welcome return to Halle of our own Charles Farncombe,

who showed throughout how experienced a Handel opera conductor he is. The soloists, led by Paul Esswood at his very best in the title-role, were excellent; the production caused some irritation because we had to watch the whole opera through a blue gauze front-drop, but this allowed some clever lighting-effects and enabled scene-changes to be invisible to the audience; the pacing was slow, particularly in the first Act — a brisker approach could have reduced the need for cuts, one felt — but we were spared some of the tiresome mannerisms of recent opera productions in Halle, since the characters did on the whole stand still to sing, and refrained from throwing each other around or using props as missiles. This was refreshing.

I did not hear *Messiah* I understand that it was given a large-scale performance in Mozart's version, but with over-dotting and vocal ornamentation, which raises some interesting questions of performance-practice.

One of the most delightful concerts took place in the lovely setting of the Goethe-Theater in Bad-Lauchstädt. The stage had a stylish back-drop depicting a wooded grove; chamber works by Telemann and Vivaldi introduced staged performances of the cantatas "Tu fedel, tu costante" and "Apollo e Dafne". "Tu fedel" was sung by Julia Gooding, who came on dressed as an Arcadian shepherdess; she sang beautifully, and accompanied it with stylised and elegant movement and gesture devised by Eva Roman, which avoided preciosity and were totally convincing. This impression was reinforced when Richard Wistreich, dressed in 18th-century court costume, joined her the longer cantata. Both sang well, and indulged in graceful movements about the stage which admirably fitted the sense of the music and the text; I had never seen this done before in a cantata, and I was quite won over. Apollo's final pursuit of Dafne in the aria "Mie piante correte" was cleverly done with balletic movements matching the musical phrases, and Dafne vanished through a trap-door, to be replaced by a



real laurel bush, complete with soil. The stylisation of movement involved the characters never looking at or touching each other, which seemed rather odd, since the implication of the text is that Apollo does so; he even refrained from looking at the laurel bush.

Several of these Halle performances had period-instrument orchestras, and it is now becoming standard to sing the operas in Italian and the oratorios in English, with vocal parts at the original pitch. In this way the Festival has become truly international in recent years, and its standards are very high. It is no longer "Händelfestspiele der DDR", of course, after the demise of that republic, but simply "Händelfestspiele in Halle (Saale)", and more groups than before come from Western Germany and abroad.

The annual meeting of the membership of the Georg-Friedrich-Händel-Gesellschaft was also the occasion for re-elections to its management committee (Vorstand). Our good friend Professor Bernd Baselt was elected President, and Winton Dean became a vice-president, while Donald Burrows was re-elected to the Vorstand. He also contributed to the Wissenschaftliches Konferenz, whose subject was "Händel und Mozart", a fine paper on the music by Handel which the Mozarts could have heard in London in 1764-5. So it is clear that the British involvement with Halle and its Festival, as well as with the edition, remains vigorous.

Terence Best

The Malmesbury Collection Survey Completed

As reported in the previous issue of *The Handel Institute Newsletter*, the 36 volumes constituting the Earl of Malmesbury's collection of manuscript copies of Handel's works have been photographed (35mm microfilm) by the Hampshire Archives Trust. The films are now available for consultation at the Hampshire Record Office, and an accompanying *Guide* has been prepared by Terence Best and myself, for use at the Record office in conjunction

with the films. The *Guide* records the gathering structure (page conjunctions), copyists, paper watermark types and rastra (stave-ruling) measurements for each volume, and gives detailed contents lists for the volumes of miscellaneous pieces. The principal contents of the volumes are as follows:

Film 1:

1. Rinaldo, HWV 7a, 7b
2. Il Pastor Fido, HWV 8a
3. Teseo, HWV 9
4. 'Utrecht' Te Deum and Jubilate, HWV 278, 279

Film 2:

5. Ode (Serenade) for the Birthday of Queen Anne, HWV 74
6. Amadigi, HWV 11
7. Acis and Galatea, HWV 49a
8. Esther, HWV 50a

Film 3:

9. Pieces for the Harpsichord
10. 'Chandos' Te Deum, HWV 281
11. Radamisto, HWV 12a
12. Muzio Scevola, Act III, HWV 13

Film 4:

13. Floridante, HWV 14
14. Ottone, HWV 15
15. Flavio, HWV 16

Film 5:

16. Giulio Cesare, HWV 17
17. Tamerlano, HWV 18
18. Rodelinda, HWV 19

Film 6:

19. Scipione, HWV 20
20. Alessandro, HWV 21
21. Admeto, HWV 22

Film 7:

22. Siroe, HWV 24
23. Riccardo, HWV 23
24. Tolomeo, HWV 25

Film 8:

25. Lotario, HWV 26
26. Partenope, HWV 27
27. Poro, HWV 28

Film 9:

28. Ezio, HWV 29
29. Sosarme, HWV 30
30. Orlando, HWV 31

Film 10:

31. Arianna, HWV 32

32. Brockes Passion, HWV 48
33. Sonatas and Concertos

Film 11

34. Overtures and Miscellaneous Pieces for Keyboard I
35. Overtures for Keyboard II
36. Fugues for Keyboard

In order to consult the films it is necessary to make advance arrangements with the record office, by writing to The County Archivist, Hampshire Record Office, 20 Southgate Street, Winchester, SO23 9EF. The authors of the *Guide* renew their thanks to the Earl of Malmesbury, Rosemary Dunhill and Sarah Lewin for their co-operation in this project, which will facilitate future work on an important collection of Handelian sources.

Donald Burrows

HHA Update

In the Spring 1991 issue we reported that after a delay caused by problems arising from German unification, the next three volumes of the HHA would appear later this year. We are pleased to report that copies are now available from Bärenreiter; the volumes are:

Series I volume 9: *Acis and Galatea* (Cannons version, 1718, with Appendix for variants of 1739 and 1742). Edited by Wolfram Windszus.

Series II Supplement 1: *Oreste* (Pasticcio, 1734). Edited by Bernd Baselt.

Series III volume 6: Anthems for Cannons III (Chandos Anthems 9-11, and the Critical Report for all three Chandos Anthems volumes). Edited by Gerald Hendrie.

The Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur der BRD, Mainz, has confirmed its support for the edition as from 1 January 1992.



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Göttinger Händel-Beiträge

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