



THE HANDEL INSTITUTE

NEWSLETTER

In this issue we have our usual reviews of the summer Handel festivals in Germany and news of the progress of the Halle Handel Edition. We are pleased also to publish some thoughts by Donald Burrows and Watkins Shaw on

the troublesome matter of continuo realization and further notice of the Handel conference planned to take place at King's College London in November 1993.

Terence Best (editor)

HÄNDELFESTSPIELE IN HALLE 1992

As we reported last year, the Halle festival has now taken on a truly international character; many artists from other countries take part, including this year an impressive number from Great Britain, and the operas and oratorios are generally performed in their original language and with the castrato parts at their original pitch. It is the largest and most ambitious of the three main German Handel festivals (the others being Göttingen and Karlsruhe), and much credit is due to the organisers of the Georg-Friedrich-Händel-Gesellschaft for the smooth running of its very complex programme. The main problem for visitors is what to leave out of a host of attractions, since it is impossible to attend more than a certain number of events, even with high-speed transfer from one to another: an example of that is provided by a group of us who emerged at 7.20 from an afternoon performance of *Alcina*, in the delightful Goethe-Theater at Bad Lauchstädt, and were in our seats 35 minutes later in the Halle opera house for Denys Darlow's performance of *Il Pastor Fido*. It is not often that one can have seven hours of almost continuous Handel opera in the theatre.

The festival began with a chamber concert by the Musical Offering in the crypt of the ancient Moritzburg. It was set in the context of an exhibition of maiolica from Halle's twin town of Karlsruhe, but to most of us the music was the most important thing - the recorder sonata HWV 377, the trio sonata Op.2 no.4, and the keyboard chaconne HWV 435, all splendidly played by this young group from Manchester. In the evening the official

opening by the Oberbürgermeister of Halle was followed by a performance of *Giulio Cesare* (see Winton Dean's separate report on the operas).

The second day's concerts began with the choir of Westminster Abbey, repeating their 1991 visit. A packed Marktkirche gave an enthusiastic reception to superb performances of the four Coronation Anthems and the organ concerto Op. 4 no. 2, played by Martin Baker; the London Handel Orchestra accompanied. Choir, organ and orchestra successfully met the formidable challenge of the reverberant acoustic, which is, I suppose, not so different from that of the choir's home surroundings.

Attending *Il Pastor Fido* that evening meant that a performance of *L'Allegro* in the arrangement by the 19th-century Halle musician Robert Franz, who was being commemorated, had to be missed by most of our party, but Percy Young was there, and reports that it was very impressive in its own particular style.

Sunday began with what is now a regular feature, a Lutheran 'Gottesdienst' in the Marktkirche, during which the fourth Chandos Anthem was performed, with a sermon sandwiched in the middle which used the words of the anthem as a text. At the members' meeting of the Georg-Friedrich-Händel-Gesellschaft, which followed, there was a presentation to Percy Young, our longest-standing member, Donald Burrows conveyed the friendly greetings of the Handel Institute, and copies of the *Spring Newsletter* (and an invitation to subscribe) were offered to interested persons. The afternoon gave us a chamber concert in the



charming Konzertsaal of the Händelhaus; this was memorable principally for the powerful singing in Bach, Handel and Alessandro Scarlatti of the admirable countertenor Axel Köhler, who had sung Caesar the previous evening: he must now be among the world's best. There were some interesting exotica by the Philidor Ensemble, such as a partita by Albrechtsberger for flute, viola d'amore and double bass.

But undoubtedly the most remarkable experience was reserved for the Sunday evening in the ancient Dom, now undergoing massive restoration; it was here that the young Handel became organist in 1702. The event was *Samson*, with the Ernst-Senff-Chor of Berlin, the Philharmonisches Staatsorchester Halle, and a team of soloists led by the excellent American tenor James Wagner in the title-role; the conductor was Heribert Beissel. There we sat, in pleasant anticipation of hearing the great work; two of us were equipped with our Chrysander scores, open at page 1, and pencil and paper for notes for this review. The baton was raised, and there came forth from Gaza a great blaze of sound in D major, a prelude of splendid power but bearing no resemblance whatever to the G-major overture on the page lying open on our knees, and not by any recognisable composer, certainly not our own George Frideric. After this initial assault we heard the short version of the first chorus, 'Awake the trumpet's lofty sound', followed by the fugue of the overture.

By now even Winton Dean was too overcome to put pencil to paper; the tone was set for what became, for me, a hilarious evening - one just did not believe that performances like this could happen any more. To say that the orchestra played with full, rich tone is an understatement: there was indeed

passion and commitment, and the three double basses and the contrafagotto ensured an over-nourished bass-line throughout. The wind were capricious: oboes failed to play at several places where the score requests their presence, but with the flutes and bassoons they converted to a charming Mozartian wind band to accompany 'To fleeting pleasures make your court' in place of Handel's strings; flutes and oboes popped up all over the place to fill empty spaces or replace the written string parts; in Dalila's 'With plaintive notes' the lively violin top line was suddenly overlaid by a mellifluously outrageous flute obbligato whose impertinence was made grosser by the fact that the flautist stood up to play it and was rewarded by a solitary applauder from somewhere in the depths of the church - whether enthusiastically or sarcastically we shall never know. A chatty glockenspiel surfaced brightly during some of the pagan choruses, and the frantic thundering on the bass drum and other implements which accompanied the dramatic climax to Act III could have been heard in the Händelhaus a quarter of a mile away.

Not that 'dramatic' is a term which could fairly be applied to this performance: the conductor seemed to have decided that this was Handel The Great Religious Composer, which meant an approach which emphasised the anthem-like power of the great choruses and quite deliberately avoided any concessions to the dramatic nature of the story by taking the recitatives at a snail's pace (with, of course, very delayed cadences) and omitting most of those which carry forward the action and help to make sense of it. So the motivation of the characters was unclear from the outset, and the final drama of the destruction of the Temple was made unintelligible by the omission of all its recitatives,

while any understanding of the theme at the centre of the second act, Dalila's treachery and her attempts to wheedle her way back into Samson's affections, was totally destroyed by the ludicrous device of having Samson sing the second couplet of 'My faith and truth'. The Dead March was omitted, as were the opening ritornello and the *B* section of 'Let the bright Seraphim', the latter a clever trick which avoided any danger of making it into a *da capo* aria.

Another most astonishing feature was that almost every aria and chorus suffered grievous internal cuts, ranging from a few bars to whole pages; the cuts were often bizarre in the extreme: Act II, for instance, began with a shortened version of 'Just are the ways of God to man', after which we moved on to the *B* section of 'Return, O God of Hosts'. The continuo accompaniment of the arias swung randomly from harpsichord to glue-like organ, and even to no keyboard instrument at all (in the slow section of 'Thy glorious deeds', which is especially fully figured by the composer - but then, who is he to have any say in the matter?).

The only plusses were the fine and expressive singing of James Wagner and the magnificent sound and discipline of the choir. Here was indeed the Big Handel of old, and very moving it often was, leaving us in no doubt about the blazing power of his choral writing. What a strange and disturbing paradox it all was: a reading which revealed an understanding of the emotional force of the individual numbers (even when whole chunks of them were ruthlessly excised), yet one which totally lacked an overall conception of the work's unity and integrity as a music drama and which seemed almost wilful in its attempt to discount these things. One felt that the conductor had never heard the



developments in Baroque performance of the last 30 years, or, if he had, that he wished to demonstrate his utter disapproval of them.

The academic conference which occupied the last two mornings had as its theme Handel arrangements in the 18th and 19th centuries. Papers ranged from the earliest arrangements, those by William Babell (and Handel himself) of opera arias, to Brahms's continuo realizations of the Italian duets and Robert Franz's arrangement of *L'Allegro*, a performance of which had been given in the festival. As for the music, sanity was restored on the Monday evening by fine performances of *Alceste* and the Ode for St Cecilia's day, which brought much pleasure in spite of some uneven solo singing.

The Editorial Board of the HHA, two of whose members (Donald Burrows and Terence Best) are nominated by the Handel Institute, met during the festival. Progress on the edition is reported elsewhere in this issue.

Terence Best

Operas at Halle and Göttingen

The first event in this year's Halle Festival, a new production of *Giulio Cesare*, was little short of a disaster, thanks to a producer who evidently had no faith in the opera and either misread the plot or corrupted it. He seemed obsessed by two urges: to display as much explicit sex as possible, and to distract the audience's attention from the music - sometimes both at once. To liven up the da capo of Caesar's 'Va tacito' we were offered the spectacle of Curio and an anonymous girl (neither of them supposed to be present) getting down to business on the floor. Caesar and Cleopatra did it more than once in Act II, though the whole point of this Act is that Cleopatra, having set

out to captivate Caesar for political reasons and then fallen in love with him, is keeping him at a distance in order to inflame his desire. In Act III we saw Tolomeo killed by Sesto while actually raping Cornelia - to the music (incredibly) of the ceremonial *sinfonia* that opens the final scene. Characters repeatedly turned up in scenes where for the best dramatic reasons they should not be present. Almost everything that happened on stage coarsened the opera, and there was no attempt to create the necessary visual magic. The scenery was meagre - no trophy for Pompey's ashes, no Parnassus, no Muses - and the costumes an unholy muddle: Caesar in white ducks, his army a posse of American footballers, his lieutenant Curio (a soldier) in a grey suit trotting about like an agitated shop assistant, Achilla and his minions got up like a gaggle of Calibans.

Musically things were better, but there were at least two major blunders. The alto part of Tolomeo was sung (seldom in tune) by a baritone, to the detriment of both music and characterisation, destroying the contrast between this feline autocrat and his bluff henchman Achilla; and nearly all the slow arias were muddled by the organ, an instrument that has no business anywhere in Handel's operas. The conductor, Alan Hacker, set good tempos for the arias but showed little feeling for the continuity and shape of the opera as a whole: there were too many long pauses, dragged recitatives and delayed cadences - and the recorders in Sesto's first aria were replaced by flutes. Nine arias were cut; had the opera been properly paced, some at least could have been restored.

All this took the gilt off some good singing. Janet Perry was an attractive

and mellifluous Cleopatra, Mária Petrašovská a reliable Cornelia, Ulrike Helzel an outstanding Sesto; her performance of 'Cara speme', an aria too often cut, was the high spot of the evening. Axel Köhler's strong countertenor is well suited to Caesar's music, and for the most part he sang well; but - apart from being placed in some undignified positions by the producer - he was inclined to yell in *forte* passages and introduced some dreadful hiccuping ornaments, especially in 'Al lampo dell'armi'.

Alcina in the little Goethe Theater at Bad Lauchstädt, another new production, also suffered from producer's whims, but to nothing like the same extent. He could plead justification in the text for the grotesque animals' heads adorning chorus and dancers (but they intruded too often) and perhaps for Ruggiero's appearance on a long pink lead in the early part of the opera; but some of his other devices were distracting or baffling or both. Puppets made more than one unsolicited incursion; Ruggiero sang 'Sta nell'Ircana' from a chariot rigged up for the occasion; and two mysterious decanters were emptied over Alcina during one of Oberto's arias. This opera does call for spectacular stage activity, but the producer missed a golden chance to exploit it by failing to make full use of the theatre's exceptional facilities for rapid scene changes.

The opera, without cuts and including the *Ariodante* ballet at the end of Act II, lasted more than four hours. This was no burden, thanks to the splendid playing of the Baroque Ensemble Sol sol la sol from Innsbruck and the stylish conducting of Howard Arman. Again there was some fine singing. Timothy Wilson (Ruggiero), another powerful countertenor, used too much tone in the recitatives but was excellent in the



arias and very moving in 'Verdi prati', sung in rapt *pianissimo*. Sally Bradshaw, despite a throat infection, was a highly dramatic Alcina. Lorna Anderson (Morgana) and Sophie Marin-Degor (the boy Oberto) were both admirable. Carolyn Watkinson (Bradamante) did nothing wrong, but her voice seems to have lost something of its former bloom. Douglas Nasrawi, while clearly relishing Oronte's music, sacrificed its subtle ironies by applying pressure worthy of a young locomotive.

Alcina was followed, after an interval of little more than half an hour and at ten miles' distance, by the 1712 *Il Pastor Fido* in the Halle opera house. It was thus possible, perhaps for the first time in history, to see two staged Handel operas, both complete to the last note, in immediate succession - a matter of some 7½ hours of music. Not many composers could stand up to this, and it made hefty demands on the listeners' attention. This was hard on *Il Pastor Fido*, by far the slighter opera, and on the young, comparatively inexperienced singers of the London Handel Society production (first heard at the Royal College of Music in March), especially as they had not been able to rehearse in the theatre. Only Maria Vassiliou (Mirtillo) seemed to have the measure of the building. Denys Darlow conducted in good style, and at least the producer knew his place.

In the single opera presented at Göttingen, *Ottone*, conductor and producer were the same person. This has clear advantages, provided he is equally and fully conversant with both mediums, stage and music. As in his performances of *Teseo* at Boston in 1985, Nicholas McGegan stationed himself at the harpsichord in the middle of the orchestra very close to the stage, where he could maintain close contact between singers and

instruments and control all the constituents of the opera.

The results were impressive. Although it is full of glorious music, *Ottone* is not the most dramatically convincing of Handel's operas. The libretto, as first written to celebrate a royal wedding at Dresden in 1719, is enormously long; Haym and Handel condensed it so ruthlessly that the behaviour of the characters, their motivation obscured, often seems absurdly inconsequent and the details of the plot difficult if not impossible to grasp. Ottone himself is an insipid hero whose reaction to almost any event is to sit down and mope (Handel sought to remedy this in a revival). His slow arias are superb; his two bravura pieces, both simile arias sung in soliloquy, react to nothing and are strangely hollow. Teofane likewise is a suffering heroine at the mercy of every wind that blows; she too has wonderful slow arias (the part was Cuzzoni's London début, though not originally written for her). Handel brilliantly recreates their moods, but they do not build up into many-faceted portraits like the characters in his greatest operas. He is more successful with the villains, especially the scheming matriarch Gismonda, whom he characteristically redeems by giving her the profoundest aria in the opera, an expression of tenderness for her scapegrace son Adelberto.

In a slack performance the opera would disintegrate. By maintaining forward movement, especially in recitatives and instant scene changes, closely co-ordinating the music with the stage action, and conducting throughout with great rhythmic buoyancy, McGegan minimised the weaknesses and, at both the performances I attended, contrived to grip the audience so firmly over 3½ hours that their enthusiasm threatened

to keep the theatre staff up for half the night. Only two details were regrettable: the omission of the first (and best) aria for Matilda, Ottone's cousin and Adelberto's betrothed (the single cut apart from two da capos in Act III, one of them sanctioned by Handel); and the failure to make use of Handel's marvellous ornaments in Teofane's part.

The singers gave excellent support. Drew Minter's voice may have lost something in volume, but he sang Ottone's music with great flexibility and taste. Ralf Popken, less vocally endowed, gave Adelberto, the second castrato role, a good deal of character. If he tended towards caricature (he appears to be a natural comedian), the opera came to no harm. Michael Dean made much of the rollicking pirate Emireno, a nautical Polyphemus who turns out to be the future Byzantine Emperor Basil II. This is a typical Boschi part, and must be grateful to any baritone. Patricia Spence, a reliable Matilda, provided a novelty by taking her cadenzas downwards into the bass clef; no one followed the deplorable habit of shooting into the upper octave as a substitute for ornamentation. Both sopranos were outstanding. Juliana Gondek sang Gismonda's music with a nice feeling for line, rhythm and the placing of ornaments, and showed herself a talented actress. Lisa Saffer, with a smallish but pure voice, was a charming Teofane, at her best in the happy Act III aria 'Gode l'alma'. From a seat in the stalls she was once or twice in danger of being covered by the orchestra (the Deutsches Theater has no pit); from the circle the balance was perfect. It is perhaps a pity that critics who have to pronounce upon a single performance cannot move about the theatre.

This production, like the Boston *Teseo*, demonstrated that an



endeavour to reproduce the workings of the Baroque theatre, especially in the management of scene changes, is a sure road - probably the best road - to the successful production of Handel's operas today. It is not a matter of being pedantic over details but of working with the grain of the opera and not against it, as in most recent Handel productions in major opera houses. In this important respect fringe performances are often superior.

Winton Dean

A Long-standing Continuo Tradition?

One of the tasks that falls to a modern editor of Handel's works is the provision of keyboard realizations for continuo. This is an activity that formalises in print an improvised tradition, and it is the common experience of practitioner-editors that many details of effective realization in performance look bad on the printed page: it would frequently be embarrassing to thus record what is actually played!

One particular and recurring problem concerns the extent to which the continuo should double, at the unison or the octave, a melodic line already present in the texture. It is difficult to recover 18th-century practices on this matter, and one's instinct is that the situation would have been confused in performance by various factors. The player may, for example, have had rather limited information in his part-book about the textures he was accompanying. There is also a rather subtle tension between theoretical technical issues concerning the 'doubling' of contrapuntal parts and the physical convenience (or attractiveness) of a realization as it falls under the hands. And, further, there is the question of function: did

the continuo player always 'accompany' in the modern sense or was there a need to 'bump' or rescue less-than-perfect soloists? Much useful evidence (and inference) is gathered in a book by Patrick Rodgers, *Continuo Realization in Handel's Vocal Music*, but this is mainly devoted to examples from Handel's operas and oratorios, which were performed in the context of practices that related rehearsal and performance in terms of established theatrical habits.

In other areas information is hard to come by, and we are thrown back on to instinct, musicianship and common sense. When editing the Violin Sonatas, for example, I found many passages of implied inescapable three-part contrapuntal harmony: on the assumption that the keyboard realization needed to be relatively suave and coherent, the choice lay between doubling the violin part (at the unison or an octave below) and reducing the texture to two parts. Where the 'given' continuo bass part moved in a fairly high tenor register, this issue met head-on the issue of texture: do you double the violin at the unison, or take the continuo top line above the violin part?

Most tantalising of all, perhaps, is the question of how Handel's church music should be accompanied on the organ. The few surviving contemporary examples of organ parts to 18th-century church music (of which there are only a handful of examples relating to works by Handel) seem more or less to double the voice parts in choruses and to provide the player with the solo line in airs. But how are soloists to be accompanied? There is a particular problem over the treble voice: doubling at the unison by a flute stop often absorbs the treble tone, while any submersion of the melody lower in the texture looks like consecutive octaves on paper. This

matter came to my attention again recently when looking over Handel's first 'verse anthem' version of *As Pants the Hart* (HWV 251a), which I originally edited for a performance I conducted in 1974. As it happens, my work on revising this edition for publication (by Oxford University Press) coincided with the possibility of a performance at Chichester, and Alan Thurlow (the Cathedral organist there) immediately questioned details in the organ realization that had been used, fairly painlessly, in 1974.

Many questions about the style of realization for organ parts simply cannot be answered definitively, in view of the shortage of evidence. It is important, however, that such evidence as there is - from whatever source - for realization practices during Handel's lifetime is carefully considered. One of the most difficult textures to accompany is that of passages in parallel thirds and sixths. Some time ago the Institute's Honorary Fellow, Watkins Shaw, mentioned to me the substance of an oral/practical tradition concerning this, and I am pleased that, since it apparently relates to traditions that were relevant to Handel's England, he has agreed to report the matter in print in the following form:

In 1904, by which time H. E. Ford (1821-1909) was past his work as organist of Carlisle Cathedral, S. H. (afterwards Sir Sydney) Nicholson was appointed as acting organist. Apparently he had some opportunity to observe Ford's methods, and towards the end of the Great War, when organist of Manchester Cathedral, Nicholson told his assistant, my late friend Arnold Goldsbrough, that when accompanying duet passages in thirds and sixths in 18th-century verse anthems Ford had recourse



to inverting the intervals on the organ (presumably, though this did not transpire when Goldsbrough passed this on to me, using a soft, sweet-toned flue stop). This would mean that as thirds would become sixths and *vice versa* the accompaniment would necessarily go higher than the voices.

How far this reminiscence is worth anything one must judge for oneself. But it immediately brought to my mind a chain of far-reaching personal contact. As a praiseworthy boy Ford had been a pupil at Rochester Cathedral under Ralph Banks (d. 1841), who in his turn had been a pupil at Durham Cathedral of Thomas Ebdon (d. 1811); and Ebdon was taught there by James Heseltine (d. 1763). Now, Heseltine was one of the latest Chapel Royal boys under John Blow and probably taught by William Croft, who was obviously helping Blow in his final years. Though organist of Durham Cathedral from 1711, there are signs that he visited and maintained contacts with London, and he subscribed to Greene's *Forty Select Anthems* in 1743.

Donald Burrows
(and Watkins Shaw)

T. W. Bourne - a postscript

Readers of Sir Thomas Armstrong's article on T. W. Bourne (1862-1948) in the last issue of the *Newsletter* may be interested to know that the author has kindly presented to the Handel Institute a small collection of compositions and miscellaneous manuscript material by Bourne. These will eventually form part of the Institute library; for the present they are deposited in the Library of the Open University, Milton Keynes, Beds.

Handel Conference 27-29 November 1993

Handel in the 1730s

The second triennial conference organised by the Handel Institute will be held at King's College London on 27 - 29 November 1993. The theme is to be 'Handel in the 1730s'. Among those offering papers are Ms Ruth Smith (Cambridge) and professors Bernd Baselt (Halle), Hans Joachim Marx (Hamburg) and Reinhard Strohm (London). Further proposals are invited for papers on the theme of the conference and on related topics. Titles and abstracts (about 100 words) should be sent by 1 March 1993 to Professor Colin Timms, Department of Music, The University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham, B15 2TT.

Halle Handel Edition

Another volume of the Hallische Händel-Ausgabe (HHA) has now appeared and may be had from Bärenreiter: this is Series III volume 9, *Anthems for the Chapel Royal*,

edited by Gerald Hendrie. It contains the Chapel Royal versions of works that also appear as Chandos Anthems, HWV 251a, 251d, 249a, 250b, 251c, 256b and 251e.

The next volumes to appear will be: Series II volume 13, *Flavio*, edited by J. Merrill Knapp; Series II volume 4/1, *Rinaldo* (1711 version), edited by David Kimbell; and Series IV volume 1, *Keyboard Works I*, revised edition edited by Terence Best.

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invite you

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