

THE HANDEL INSTITUTE

NEWSLETTER

We apologise for the late publication of this issue of the *Newsletter*, which is due to a build-up of work during the second half of the Christmas term. The issue includes the usual report on the summer Handel festivals in Germany, but begins with news of a hitherto unknown source of anecdotes about Handel, contributed by one

of our subscribers. We also publish information on some forthcoming Handelian events and on the future of the Coke Collection, following the death of Mrs Coke in August 1995, and announcements about the next round of Handel Institute Awards and the next Handel Institute conference.

Terence Best

BURNEY ON HANDEL: A NEW SOURCE

Dr Charles Burney is the main source of most of the anecdotes that have come down to us concerning Handel. These were published in his *Account of the Musical Performances in Westminster-Abbey and the Pantheon... in Commemoration of Handel* (London, 1785). It was with great excitement that I received the news from my colleague, Dr Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, of the Department of Manuscripts and Records, National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth, that a small notebook among the library's collections, which she had had recourse to consult, contained anecdotes concerning Handel recorded from Dr Burney's own lips.

The volume (NLW, Brogyntyn MS 8499) is in the handwriting of Margaret Owen (1742-1816) of Penrhos, Llandrinio, Montgomeryshire, who, about the year 1776, was introduced into the fashionable literary circle which met at Mrs Thrale's house in Streatham. There she became friendly not only with the Thrales but also with Dr Samuel Johnson, James Boswell, Oliver Goldsmith, Dr Burney



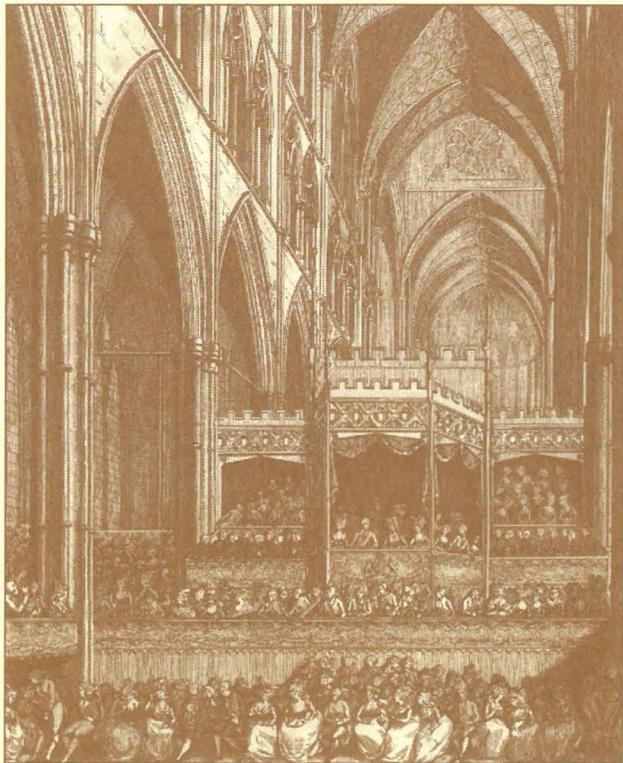
Dr Charles Burney: engraving by Francesco Bartolozzi after painting by Sir Joshua Reynolds

and Fanny Burney (see B. G. Charles, Peggy Owen and her Streatham friends', *Cornhill Magazine*, lxxxvii (1939), 33-51). An inscription inside the front cover of the notebook indicates that it was given to Margaret Owen by Henry Thrale, Mrs Thrale's first husband, on 19 September 1776. In it, she has recorded memoranda and anecdotes concerning members of the Streatham circle, including Johnson & Goldsmith.

The anecdotes concerning Handel are written on pp. 22 and 25-8 and were told to her by Dr Burney on 28 September (probably in 1777), at Brighton, when the Thrales and some of their friends were on holiday there.

There are three anecdotes in all. The first is the well-known account of Handel stealing away to drink champagne (Burgundy in the printed version), leaving his guests to drink port (see Burney, *op. cit.*, p. 32 note (a)). The second describes an occasion when the Prince of Wales desired Handel to give his opinion of the former's musical compositions. This, as far as I know, has not been recorded elsewhere. The third is a more earthy version of the

'Handel's in a passion' anecdote (see Burney, p. 36). The account ends with a comment that Handel regarded George II's daughter Anne, wife of William, Prince of Orange, his best pupil, and Hester Temple, Viscountess Cobham (died 1752), his second best.



The gallery for the Royal Family at the Commemoration of Handel in Westminster Abbey.

[1]: Dr Burney mention'd some particulars about Handel, w'ch tho' trifling in themselves, yet as they relate to such a great man, they may not be altogether unentertaining. He had invited company to dinner & as soon as it was over he told them a thought came into his Head & desir'd they would excuse his absence for a little while. He went into the next Room & one of the company had the curiosity to peep through the Key Hole & saw him tossing off half pints of champagne w'ch L'd Radnor had given him & left them to drink humble Port (Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Brogyntyn MS 8499, p. 22).

[2]: More particulars about Handel from Dr Burney who us'd to meet him often at Sig'ra Frazi's whom he (Burney) taught to sing English. He was always very free with the Royal family particularly with the P and P's of Wales & one day the prince told him he had compos'd some music & desir'd him to hear it. Handel made a pish at it, but the Prince said he should hear it & had Weideman, Vincent & the band call'd. They began to play it. Handel seem'd much dissatisfied & said it was very bad, upon w'ch the Prince order'd them to try another piece of his composition & ask'd Handel how he lik'd that, 'Worse & Worse', replied the musician.

[3]: He was one day at Carlton House, where there was a rehearsal of one of his Oratorios. The Princess of Wales talk'd to her ladies & did not seem to mind it much, upon which Handel cried, 'Stop, stop, you Bitch', loud enough for her R Highness to hear. He reckon'd the P's of Orange his best Scholar & L'dy Cobham the next (Brogyntyn MS 8499, pp. 26-8).

Graham Thomas

THE GÖTTINGEN AND HALLE FESTIVALS 1995

The two summer Handel festivals in Germany continue the sensible arrangement they have had for some years, that one immediately precedes the other with a blank day in between to allow the faithful to make the somewhat wearisome 100-mile journey between the two cities, happily no longer divided by a frontier. This year both festivals made an honourable contribution to the Purcell tercentenary as well as the usual celebration of Handel. It was clear that while the music of the English master was unfamiliar to many in the audiences, they could not fail to be impressed by its power and originality; it was greatly applauded.

GÖTTINGEN

The Göttingen Festival (1-6 June) appropriately had as its theme 'Händel und die englische Tradition', in recognition of the powerful influence that the works of Purcell and his contemporaries had on Handel. A chamber concert offered a well-chosen programme of choral works by Blow, Purcell and Handel (Chandos anthems), and the first *Nachtkonzert* was all Purcell, except for its concluding item, Blow's *Ode on the Death of Mr Henry Purcell*, which we were to hear again in Halle. An orchestral concert in the St Jacobikirche, given by the Freiburger Barockorchester, consisted of works by Purcell, Arne (the cantata *The Morning*), Stanley and Handel (suite from *Oreste*), while the third *Nachtkonzert* brought in Matthew Locke as well as Purcell. All these concerts were excellently played and sung.

One of the most delightful events I attended (though not part of the official festival) was an 'Open-Door Konzert' (*sic*, in German!) in the splendid great hall of the old Rathaus on the Sunday morning, in which the Göttinger Knabenchor sang cantatas and anthems by Purcell, Buxtehude, Bach and Handel, accompanied by a modern-instrument orchestra which also played two Handel concerti grossi in fine style. It was obvious that Purcell's tricky and idiosyncratic vocal writing in the anthem 'Lord, how long wilt thou be angry', combined with the need to sing it in English, presented problems for the highly-skilled boys'



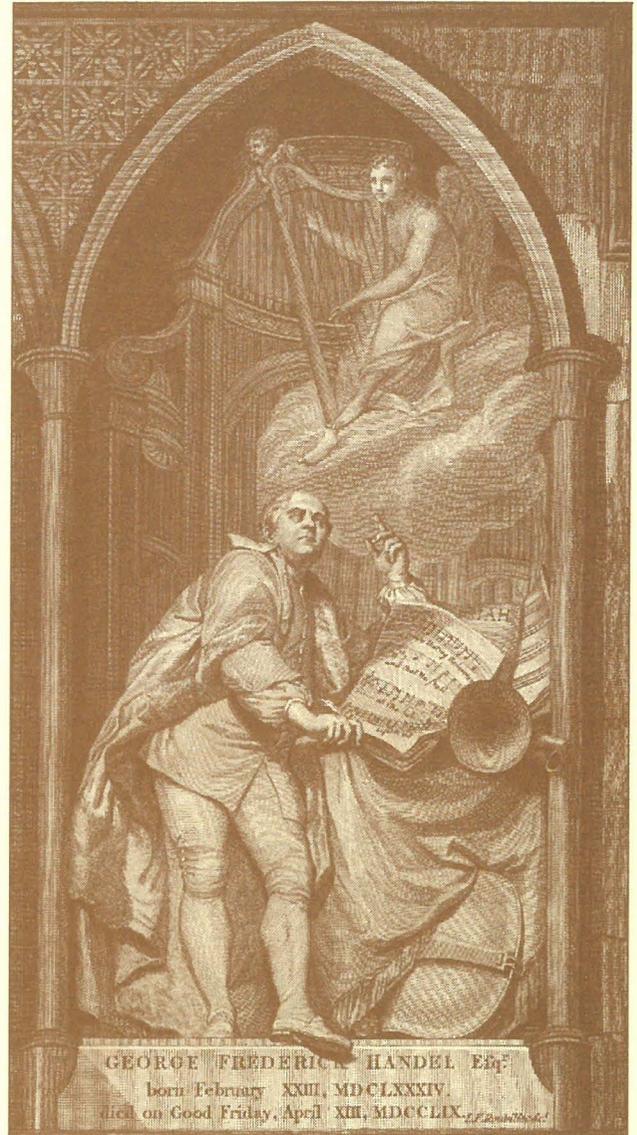
choir, who were unfamiliar with an idiom which even native English choirs still find elusive and difficult. With Buxtehude and Bach they were comfortably on home ground, and sang superbly, as they did in Handel's Coronation anthem 'Let thy hand be strengthened'; a remarkably assured twelve-year old treble, Stefan Sauer, gave a beautifully poised account of two of Handel's German arias, and received the loudest applause of the morning.

The major Handel event was *Ariodante*, on the stage of the Deutsches Theater, given by Nicholas McGegan and his experienced team of singers, now regulars in Göttingen, and the ever-faithful and enthusiastic Freiburger Barockorchester. If there has been a production in recent years which crystallises the best of the experience of a whole generation of Handel opera performances into an ideal, near-perfect rendering, this was it, generating the feeling that 'this is what we have been leading up to all these years; this is how to do it'.

Ariodante is, of course, one of the very finest of the operas, and with the greatness of the work as a starting-point for a wonderful evening's music, we had stylish singing and playing, McGegan's unerring sense of the right pacing of recitatives and arias, his joyous enthusiasm for the whole proceedings, and not least an impressive production by Drew Minter, with gorgeous traditional sets, sumptuous eighteenth-century costumes and an approach to movement and gesture which, while basically naturalistic, made some concession to Baroque stylisation. What a relief this was after the many tiresomely trendy productions we have endured elsewhere in recent years.

The title-role was sung by Lorraine Hunt, supported by an experienced cast of Juliana Gondek (Ginevra), Lisa Saffer (Dalinda), Jennifer Lane (Polinesso, a role written for a woman), Nicolas Cavallier (King), and Rufus Müller and Jörn Lindemann as Lurcanio and Odoardo. It was all quite outstanding, and vastly superior to the hapless Coliseum production of two years ago. All four performances were sold out, and the authorities told us that they could have sold four more. A very senior British Handelian said to me - not without a touch of regret, I felt - 'It seems that Baroque opera is taking over from English oratorio, just the reverse of what happened in Handel's lifetime!' With performances like this, no wonder.

Among other important Handel events (it was impossible to go to them all, so *Alexander's Feast* had to be missed) was *Messiah*, in the Johanniskirche, conducted by Frieder Bernius, with the Kammerchor and Barockorchester Stuttgart and a strong team of soloists - Ann Monoyios, Daniel Taylor, William Kendall, and that veteran among



Handel's Monument in Westminster Abbey, with part of *Messiah*

Handel bass singers, David Thomas. It moved at a spanking pace, in the modern manner, and we were made to feel the theatrical tradition behind much of the writing. Dramatic moments were very dramatic: the string chords in 'Thy rebuke hath broken his heart', for instance, were played *sforzando*, an effect I have never heard before. Advantage was taken of Monoyios's participation to have the less familiar soprano versions of 'But who may abide' and 'Thou art gone up on high', and the soprano solo version of 'He shall feed his flock'. It was a pity that the libretto printed in the programme-book was ludicrously out of line with the version actually sung.

The performance had some peculiar features. No harpsichord was present, so all the continuo was provided by the organ and, as is usual when this happens, the effect was near-fatal in its intrusiveness in the arias. The worst feature, however, was the utterly unauthentic addition of trills and



appoggiaturas to the chorus parts. This became ludicrous when, in 'Behold the Lamb of God', the word 'Lamb' had at every occurrence a wobbly trill which sounded uncannily like the bleating of that animal, an effect hardly calculated to enhance the dignity of this noblest of choruses. One's patience was sorely tried also when, in 'And with his stripes', the powerful downward leap of a seventh to the note bearing the word 'stripes' was emasculated by a long appoggiatura from above, and a trill, every time it occurred. Just as absurd was the rendering of 'I know that my Redeemer liveth', in which the violins had many appoggiaturas but the singer did not.

The final Festkonzert was given by the well-known Baroque orchestra, La Stagione Frankfurt, who have the considerable virtue that they play with full tone and a total avoidance of the thin wiry sound affected by some groups. There was a contrabassoon that played throughout, which was rather odd, but it was not intrusive; the absence of an organ meant that the *Alexander's Feast* concerto lacked a part which Handel wrote for it, but it was effective enough. Ann Monoyios sang a radiant *Silete venti*, and we had rather too much of Geminiani's tedious *The Enchanted Forest*. The concert ended with a rollickingly rough and bucolic performance of the *Concerto a due cori*, HWV 334, in which the frequent burps in the natural horns were part of the fun; it brought the house down.

The 'Internationale Symposium' rather curiously had a different theme from the main one of the Festival - 'Europäische Traditionen im Spätwerk Händels'. The idea was to relate Handel's late works (defined as those written after 1738) with the wider European tradition. Papers were read by Klaus Hortschansky, Terence Best (on Op. 6), Albert Gier, Dorothea Schröder (on *Theodora*), John Roberts (on borrowings from Italian chamber duets and trios) and Christoph Wolff. Altogether Göttingen was a most enjoyable festival, with more events than one person could cover, and excellent organisation and hospitality; and, of course, the town is delightful.

HALLE

The Halle Festival this year had one unusual feature which we hope will not be repeated: there was no opera. There were, however, many things to enjoy, and old friends to meet. The opening ceremony was of particular significance for us, because Winton Dean was awarded the Handel Prize, in the course of a fine speech by the Oberbürgermeister, Dr Klaus Rauen, who showed that he was no mean linguist by giving parts of it in excellent English and Italian (the latter as a welcome to official visitors from Pisa). It was good to see our senior Handelian honoured in this way in the

birthplace of his favourite composer, for whose music he has done so much in our time.

The ceremony was followed by a performance of *Semele*, staged as the 'bawdy opera' of Jennens's description, with a fine cast led by Janet Williams as the heroine, with Axel Köhler as Athamas, Patricia Spence as Juno, Nils Giesecke as Jupiter, and the chorus of the Halle opera house, accompanied by the Händelfestspielorchester conducted by the Englishman Howard Arman. A nice touch was that the small part of Cupido was sung by Arman's young son, Sebastian.

Alas, we were once more into 'producer's opera', devised by Fred Berndt, who had an interpretational 'concept'. During the overture we found ourselves in a cinema, with a cleaner sweeping the floor in anticipation of the chorus appearing as the cinema audience, who were greeted by 'Paramount Pictures' on the screen. Having taken their seats, the members of the 'audience' each put on a plastic mask with a huge single eye in it. Guess, gentle reader, the significance of that! It turned out to be not only silly but musically catastrophic, because the chorus, already too far back, seemed at times unable to see or hear what was going on, with resultant failures of ensemble. In due course the concept unfolded: *Semele* was a Hollywood starlet who was attracted to Jupiter because he was a film-producer, nattily dressed in an expensive white suit and looking uncommonly like Clark Gable. He sang 'Where e'er you walk' from the top of a camera-gantry, and the chorus took flash photos of *Semele* as she ascended heavenwards at the end of the first act.

In spite of all this, there were some pretty visual effects, with rural backdrops, a stunning cloudscape for the celestial scenes, where the chorus were cutely dressed as clouds, and some spectacular bangs and lighting effects. When at the end of Act I *Semele* sings of her joy in the realms above in 'Endless pleasure, endless love', she was meant to float above the stage in a half-moon-shaped chariot suspended on wires, but unfortunately it went out of control and Janet Williams fell heavily on to the stage. The performance was interrupted, and it was feared that she might be injured; but, although shaken, she resumed within a few minutes to great applause and the incident seemed to have no effect on her performance.

In Acts II and III the image of the eye surfaced again: the swaying heavenly platform on which the action took place was duly revealed as eyeshaped, as was Somnus's cave. There were also some amusing touches: Iris was an air hostess, giving a delightful new twist to Juno's line 'A speedy flight we'll take'. At least all this gallimaufry was visually pleasing. Only at the end did one's irritation finally



erupt when Semele's death in Jupiter's fires was made as undramatic as one could possibly imagine: it was musically slack, and the poor girl expired with a film-studio spotlight trained on her, operated by men in protective clothing: I presume it was supposed to be nuclear; the modern deity, you see, punishes our *hubris* by incinerating us with atomic power. Wow!

Janet Williams was superb throughout, suitably kittenish and wilful, with a particularly brilliant rendering of 'Myself I shall adore'. Axel Köhler, usually so good, seemed ill at ease with the admittedly dull part of Athamas and failed to make an impact. Nils Giesecke's Jupiter was well sung, but his poor English was a drawback. Patricia Spence was powerfully menacing as Juno. The choral singing and orchestral playing (barring a few mishaps in ensemble) were good, and Howard Arman conducted with an appropriate sense of style; there was too much intrusive organ continuo, and the first act seemed too long (it can do with cutting).

Altogether it was an evening of mixed pleasure. Handel's marvellous music stood up nobly to the various assaults made on it by the production and he certainly came off best. We were therefore in a mood to enjoy the splendid reception given afterwards by the Oberbürgermeister, which was preceded by an open-air performance in the Marktplatz of a new composition by Thomas Buchholz for carillon and brass.

The annual pilgrimage to the Goethe-Theater in Bad Lauchstädt is a must, and this year's offering was a superb performance of *La Resurrezione* by Marc Minkowski's Les Musiciens du Louvre. It was semi-staged, a difficult thing to do with an oratorio of this type, but it was stylised, unfussy, and remarkably effective, although I found the ballet sequences, performed very skilfully by Opera Atelier of Toronto, somewhat distracting. Last year I was very critical of Minkowski's performance of some Handel concertos on the ground of excessively fast tempos; but for this *Resurrezione* I have nothing but praise: perhaps tempos were occasionally misjudged, and there were some odd continuo effects, but overall it was extraordinarily powerful and brought out the originality and strength of the work.

The Purcell tercentenary was celebrated in Halle, as it had been in Göttingen, and the main event in this context was a concert performance of the music from *King Arthur*, given by those most experienced interpreters of this repertory, Trevor Pinnock's English Concert. The audience loved every minute of it, especially the seaside concert-party clowning in the 'Old England' chorus, which wowed them so much it had to be repeated. Such a performance, we hope, has won Purcell many new admirers in Germany.

The big Sunday afternoon concert in the Konzerthalle was *Theodora*, with Jonathan Peter Kenny as Didymus,

Toby Spencer as Septimius, and conductor Marcus Creed - so the British contribution was impressive. Ruth Ziesak sang the title-role. This was a sound, well-paced performance, again spoilt by too much organ continuo, but there was nevertheless much to enjoy.

There were many smaller concerts, one including choral music by the almost unknown 17th-century Halle composer David Pohle, and others devoted to Baroque chamber and orchestral music. The second of two concerts 'in memoriam Henry Purcell' was called 'The matchless man' and given in the charming concert room of the Händelhaus by the Purcell Ensemble Leipzig, which includes such leading figures as the countertenor Christopher Robson and the gamba player Siegfried Pank. This was a delightful affair, featuring two solo cantatas by Handel, excerpts from *The Fairy Queen* and Blow's remarkable Ode on Purcell's death, in which Robson was joined by his compatriot William Purefoy.

The Wissenschaftliches Konferenz was devoted to the work of Paul Thiersch, who was an influential dramaturg in the 1920s, during the early years of the Handel opera revival; there was an exhibition of his work in the Moritzburg during the Festival.

It was a delightful couple of weeks, and it is good that Handel is so well honoured in the land of his birth, in performances which get better each year.

Terence Best

THE COKE COLLECTION

As many readers will know, the collection of Handel manuscripts and early editions made by Gerald Coke between the 1930s and his death in 1990 is the most important Handel collection assembled by anybody in the twentieth century. For many years he and his wife Patricia gave a most generous welcome, in their beautiful home at Jenkyn Place in Bentley, Hampshire, to scholars who wished to study the Collection. After Gerald's death Patricia very kindly allowed continued access to the material until her own death in August 1995. Gerald took a great interest in the Handel Institute: he was its first Patron and wished his collection to be placed in the Institute's care. The Institute is currently involved in negotiations about the future of the Collection; meanwhile, the manuscripts and printed volumes are to have a temporary home in Hampshire Record Office in Winchester. Any scholar wishing to consult an item in the collection during this period should apply in writing to the County Archivist, Rosemary Dunhill, Hampshire Record Office, Sussex Street, Winchester, Hants, SO23 8TH.

HANDEL EVENTS: JANUARY – JUNE 1996

12 February

Rodelinda in Blackheath
(flyer enclosed)

23 February to 5 March

Händel-Festspiele in Karlsruhe

Contact Wolfgang Sieber, Baumeisterstrasse, Karlsruhe

26 March to 24 April

London Handel Festival

(director Denis Darlow)

26-29 March, *Arminio*, Britten Theatre,
Royal College of Music

5 April, *Bach St John Passion*, St George's,
Hanover Square

12 April, *La Resurrezione*, St George's

15 April, a programme of popular music of the
18th century, presented by Lucy Skeaping,
Thomas Coram Foundation

24 April, Handel Chandos anthem, and Pepusch
Apollo and Daphne (first modern performance)

Box office from 1 February: 0181 336 0900

31 May to 3 June

Göttinger Händel-Festspiele

Contact Geschäftsstelle der Göttinger Händel-Festspiele,
Hainholzweg 3-5, D-37085 Göttingen

7 to 11 June

Händel-Festspiele, Halle

Contact Büro der Händel-Festspiele,
Grosse Nikolaistrasse 5-6,
D-06108 Halle (Saale)

HANDEL AND HIS RIVALS

Handel and his Rivals' is the theme of the next conference to be organised by the Handel Institute. The conference will take place on Saturday 30 November and Sunday 1 December 1996 at King's College London. The theme may be interpreted broadly to include colleagues and associates, as well as competitors, mainly living in London but not necessarily exclusively so. As in previous conferences, papers will probably have to be restricted to about 30 minutes' duration. Offers of papers and other enquiries should be addressed to Professor Colin Timms, Department of Music, The University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 2TT.

HANDEL INSTITUTE AWARDS 1996/97

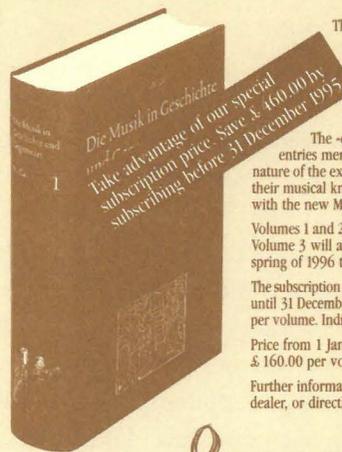
Applications are invited for Handel Institute Awards, financed from funds made available by European Music Year, to assist in the furtherance of projects involving the music or life of **George Frideric Handel** or his associates. One or more awards may be offered, up to a total of £1,000.

Applicants should send to the Secretary of the Handel Institute, Professor Colin Timms, Department of Music, The University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham, B15 2TT (England), an outline of their proposed project, a breakdown of the anticipated expenditure and a note of any other funding applied for or received. They should also ask two referees to write on their behalf (references will not be solicited). The deadline for the receipt of applications and references is 1 September 1996. All applicants will be contacted as soon as possible thereafter.

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