

NEWSLETTER

of

The American Handel Society

Volume XXXI, Number 3

Winter 2016

THE LONG STRANGE CAREER OF A HANDEL MISATTRIBUTION, 1727–2013

As recently as 2013, a beginning flute student preparing for the Grade 2 flute exam administered by The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (a British music examination agency) might have ended up practicing a short march by G. F. Handel. The piece was labeled “A March in Richard the First.” (This referred of course to the 1727 opera more properly known as *Riccardo Primo*.) The March is indeed by Handel, but it is not from “Richard the First.” In fact, it comes from an earlier Handel opera, *Floridante* (1721)—one of two Marches in that opera.

I stumbled on the origin of this little mistake two years ago, in the course of writing a paper for the American Handel Society Conference in Iowa about the appropriation of the (real) *Riccardo Primo* March for use as an early Methodist hymn in 1742. As I was searching for the earliest printings of the March, copies the Methodists might have used in fashioning their hymn, I came across several instances of the very same misattribution—a March from *Floridante* given the erroneous title “March in Richard the Ist.” The following report, then, is an account of the odd trajectory that created this misattribution and caused it to linger into the present—and, because some of the youthful flutists who learned this piece just a few years ago are barely teenagers, perhaps into the foreseeable future as well.

The mistake first surfaced with the English music publisher John Walsh, Sr. In 1729 Walsh brought out a set of Handel miscellanies, 60 minuets and a dozen marches he had assembled from diverse sources, transcribed for solo flute or violin and published as *A General Collection*. Leading off the set of twelve Marches was the misattributed “March in Richard the Ist.”

As it turns out, the *second* March in Walsh’s 1729 Handel collection adds to the confusion. Printed on the same page as and directly below the erroneously-named “March in Richard the Ist,” this second piece is

ANOTHER REFERENCE TO HANDEL IN THE MONTAGU CORRESPONDENCE

Ellen Harris, in her award-winning book *George Frideric Handel: A Life with Friends* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2014), introduces the reader to the appealing figure of Anne Donnellan (c. 1700–1762), who was also featured in the exhibition of the same title curated by Prof. Harris and presented at Handel & Hendrix in London (formerly Handel House Museum) between July 1, 2015 and January 10, 2016.¹ Donnellan was a gifted amateur singer, a skilled conversationalist and a perceptive critic, as witnessed in her correspondence with Samuel Richardson on the subject of his novels.

Mrs. Donnellan, so styled although she never married, was the daughter of Nehemiah Donnellan, Chief Baron of the Irish Exchequer from 1702 until his death in 1705. Her mother subsequently married Philip Percival, younger brother of Sir John Percival, who became the Earl of Egmont in 1733 and whose diary is often cited. Donnellan’s family moved from Dublin to London in the late 1720s where she quickly became friends with her exact contemporary, the widowed Mary Granville Pendarves (later Mrs. Delany), and also became a friend and keen supporter of Handel. Through Mrs. Pendarves she was introduced to Margaret Cavendish Harley (1715–1785), Duchess of Portland following her 1734 marriage to William Bentinck, and around 1740 to her protégé Elizabeth Robinson (1718–1800), subsequently to be known under her married name of Montagu as “The Queen of the Bluestockings.”²

Donnellan was staying with the Duchess of Portland, presumably at her London house, when she wrote a letter to Elizabeth Robinson dated only “April

1 See Ellen T. Harris, “Exhibition: ‘Handel: A Life with Friends’ Handel & Hendrix in London July 1, 2015–January 10, 2016,” *Newsletter of The American Handel Society* XXX/3 (Winter 2015): 1, 4-5. See also Ellen T. Harris, “Three Ladies of Handel’s Will,” *Newsletter of The American Handel Society* XV/1-2 (April/August 2000): 1, 4-7.

2 See Graydon Beeks, “Mirth, Melancholy, and the Future Mrs. Montagu,” *Newsletter of The American Handel Society* XXX/1 (Spring 2015): 1, 4-5.