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AMERICAN HANDEL FESTIVAL 2017: CONFERENCE REPORT

Carlo Lanfossi

This year, Princeton University (Princeton, NJ) hosted the biennial *American Handel Festival* on April 6-9, 2017. From a rainstorm on Thursday to a shiny Sunday, the conference unfolded with the usual series of paper sessions, two concerts, and a keynote address. The assortment of events reflected the kaleidoscopic variety of Handel's scholarship, embodied by a group of academics and performers that spans several generations and that looks promising for the future of Handel studies.

After the opening reception at the Woolworth Music Center, the first day of the conference was marked by the Howard Serwer Memorial Lecture given by John Butt (University of Glasgow) on the title "Handel and *Messiah*: Harmonizing the Bible for a Modern World?" Reminding the audience of the need to interrogate the cultural values inherent to the creation of *Messiah*, Butt structured his keynote address around various topics and methodologies, including an analysis of Handel's "uncanny" ability to harmonize the Bible, and the philosophical influence of the early modern idea of "self" (especially through the lens of Shaftesbury's writings) in shaping both Handel's approach to the oratorio and our own "harmonization" as listeners.

Friday featured three sessions devoted respectively to "Text, Music & Rhetoric," "Oratorio," and "Singers." It was the occasion to listen to both young graduate students and renowned faculty sharing the stage of the Taplin Auditorium in Fine Hall. The first session began with a close look at one of the two Spanish cantatas that Handel set to music during his Italian residency. Andrés Locatelli (Università degli Studi di Pavia, Italy) shed new light on the circulation of Spanish texts in seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Rome through a detailed analysis of the cantata text *No se emenderá jamás* with philological insights into the sources and the attribution of the text to Antonio Hurtado de Mendoza. The session continued



with the exploration by Fredric Fehleisen (The Juilliard School) of the network of musical associations in *Messiah*, highlighting musical-rhetorical patterns through Schenkerian reductions and a request for the audience to hum the accompanying harmony of "I know that my Redeemer liveth." Finally, Minji Kim (Andover, MA) reconstructed an instance of self-borrowing in the chorus "I will sing unto the Lord" from *Israel in Egypt*, tracing the musical lineage to the incipit of the English canon "Non nobis, Domine" through its use in the Cannons anthem *Let God Arise* and the *Utrecht Te Deum*. The session devoted to the oratorio focused both on the influence of the Italian *opera seria* on the 1748 oratorio *Alexander Balus* (Kenneth Nott, University of Hartford) and on the ongoing contemporary discussion of the role of the clergy during Handel's time and its reflection in the portrayal of priests in his English oratorios (Ruth Smith, Handel Institute). The session on singers started with Farinelli and the investigation on the use and misattribution of the aria "Son qual nave" in his 1734 debut with *Artaserse*. Randall Scotting (Royal College of Music) argued that the composer Giovanni Antonio Gaj was behind much of the music for the London version. While David Vickers (Royal Northern College of Music) explored the repertory performed by Giulia Frasi in England after her arrival in 1742 (with cues to the changing styles of English music), Lawrence Zazzo (Newcastle University) gave a few hints as to who might have sung the Italian arias that Handel inserted in the 1744 revival of *Semele* (potential candidates: Filippo Rochetti as Athamas and a certain "Miss Robinson" as Juno).

The rest of Friday was dedicated to the performance of an intriguing selection of pieces from the 1741 Dublin version of *Messiah*. At Trinity Church (crowded to its full capacity), the concert was first introduced by Malcolm Bruno, who curated the autograph edition. Bruno summarized the intricate editorial story of *Messiah*, its orchestration and textual conundrums, up to the history of the German translation of the libretto by Johann Gottfried Herder. Thus, the concert featured pieces from *Messiah* both in English and German. John Butt conducted the Princeton University Chamber Choir and Nassau Sinfonia with precision and nuance.

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