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HANDEL'S BLINDNESS AND ITS EFFECT ON HIS COMPOSING

Kenneth Nott

On December 31, 1757 the Earl of Shaftesbury wrote to James Harris: "I saw Mr. Handel the other day, who is pretty well and has just finished the composing of several new songs for Frederica [Cassandra Frederick] his new singer, from whom he has great expectations."¹ This oft cited letter touches directly on an issue that remains unresolved in Handel studies, namely, to what extent were the late (that is, post-1752) additions to the oratorios actually composed by Handel? A definitive answer does not come easily, if at all.

The "new songs" that Shaftesbury referred to are: "Sorrow darkens ev'ry feature," "Happy Beauty," "No more complaining," "Pleasure's gentle zephyrs playing," and "Charming Beauty." They survive as inserts to the performing score of *The Triumph of Time and Truth*, are not in the composer's hand and are, in some cases, re-arrangements of movements from earlier works. In an influential essay published over three decades ago, Anthony Hicks found these and other late additions musically inferior, claiming that they "often display un-Handelian features," including "through-composed structures, sometimes awkwardly balanced with a shortened, not to say perfunctory, reprise."² Hicks argues that the newly composed parts of the late additions are the work of "a composer a generation younger than Handel," most likely John Christopher Smith the younger.³ Hicks's position has gained wide acceptance. Donald Burrows in his authoritative biography of Handel echoes Hicks when he concludes that, "at best, the additions exhibit varying degrees of 'Handel-ness'...."⁴ Yet in an essay written in 2011, Hans Dieter Clausen has countered that Handel's creative involvement in these additions was likely significant and that there is a need to re-examine this whole issue.⁵ In this article, I would like to address the question of the effect of Handel's blindness on his "composing" by concentrating on the assumptions that have guided the discourse thus far, and propose a new, possibly more fruitful avenue of inquiry. I wish to emphasize that the scope of this article will not allow for analysis of individual movements (something I plan to present at a later date). Rather, I would like to focus on the philosophical and methodological issues that have thus far informed the debate.

1 Donald Burrows and Rosemary Dunhill, *Music and Theatre in Handel's World: The Family Papers of James Harris, 1732–1780* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 327.

2 Anthony Hicks, "The Late Additions to Handel's Oratorios and the Role of the Younger Smith," in *Music in Eighteenth-Century England: Essays in Memory of Charles Cudworth*, ed. Christopher Hogwood and Richard Luckett (New York: Caambridge University Press, 1983), 169.

3 Ibid.

4 Donald Burrows, *Handel*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 486.

5 Hans Dieter Clausen, "Händel oder Smith? Neue Aspekte zur Autorschaft der neu komponierten oder bearbeiteten Arien und Chorsätze in den Oratorienaufführungen zwischen 1752 und 1759," *Aria: eine Festschrift für Wolfgang Ruf* (Zurich: Hildesheim, 2011), 317–30. See also John H. Roberts, "'Blooms of Youth': A Solomonic Addendum," *Händel Jahrbuch* 61 (2015): 413–24, esp. 419–22.

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REPORT FROM HALLE 2018

Graydon Beeks



This year's Handel Festival in his birthplace of Halle, Germany was built around the theme of "Fremde Welten" ("Foreign Worlds") and took place from May 25 to June 10, 2018. The festival featured first performances of works utilizing performing material derived from five newly published or soon-to-be-published volumes of the Hallische Händel-Ausgabe (HHA), which surely must be a record. Because of the length of the festival and the scheduling of meetings and conference sessions, your reviewer was only able to attend a select number of events near the beginning. Nevertheless, I will attempt to give an overview of the entire proceedings.

Following the traditional opening ceremony at the Handel Memorial in the late afternoon of Friday, May 25, the Festival continued with the first performance of *Berenice, Regina d'Egitto*—the only one of Handel's operas that had not previously been staged in Halle—at the Opera House. The musical text was that of Wolfgang Hirschmann's forthcoming HHA volume, and it was well played by the Händelfestspielorchester Halle under the direction of Jörg Halubek, making his first appearance in the house. Fortunately, the cartage company had failed to deliver an organ to the pit, but they had again provided a load of percussion instruments instead. The singers were led by soprano Romelia Lichtenstein, who gave a commanding performance in the title role, although she tired a bit toward the end of taxing sing. It

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