

NEWSLETTER

of

The American Handel Society

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American Handel Festival. 21-24 Feb, 2013.
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Angelica Kauffmann, British, born in Switzerland, 1741-1807 Portrait of Sarah Harrop (Mrs. Bates) as a Muse ca. 1780-81 Oil on canvas 142 x 121 cm. (55 7/8 x 47 5/8 in.) Princeton University Art Museum. Museum purchase, Surdna Fund and Fowler McCormick, Class of 1921, Fund 2010-11 photo: Bruce M. White

SAVE THE DATE!

AMERICAN HANDEL FESTIVAL AT PRINCETON

21-24 FEBRUARY, 2013

The 2013 American Handel Festival will take place at Princeton University on February 21-24. In addition to the academic panels, the 2013 Serwer Lecture will be given by Reinhard Strohm. Other festival events will include a performance of Handel's *Dixit Dominus* and Alessandro Scarlatti's *Stabat Mater* by the Princeton University Chamber Choir, conducted by Gabriel Crouch, and a concert by Harry Bicket and the English Concert. There will be an option on Sunday, February 24th to hear Mr. Bicket conduct a performance of Handel's *Radamisto* at Carnegie Hall.

For more information: <http://music2.princeton.edu/AHS/>

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK SUMMER 2012

I would like to thank all the members of the Society who have paid their membership dues for 2012, and especially those who paid to be members of the Georg-Friedrich-Händel Gesellschaft and/or friends of The Handel Institute before the beginning of June, as requested by the Secretary/Treasurer. For those of you who have not yet renewed your memberships, may I urge you to do so.

Each year the end of spring brings with it the Handel Festivals in Halle and Göttingen, the latter now regularly scheduled around the moveable date of Pentecost, which is a three-day holiday in Germany. Elsewhere in this issue of the Newsletter you will find my necessarily selective Report from Halle. While there I heard excellent reports on the staging of *Amadigi* at Göttingen. Perhaps other members of the AHS would be willing to provide reports on the performances at Göttingen, and also those at Halle that I was unable to attend. If so, I am sure that the Newsletter Editor would be happy to receive them.

The opening of the festival in Halle coincided with the news of the death of the soprano Judith Nelson, who was a personal friend to many of us. She excelled in music from the Baroque and Classical periods, and we are fortunate to have so many of her performances preserved on commercial recordings. She gave many memorable performances of Handel's music, and she will be especially remembered for her participation in a series of recordings under the direction of Christopher Hogwood that included the classic recreation of the 1749 Foundling Hospital version of *Messiah*, released both in audio and video formats.

It is not too early to begin thinking about the upcoming AHS Festival and Conference which will take place next February at Princeton University. Wendy Heller is coordinating the local arrangements, and promises an appropriate sequel to the splendid event she organized for us at Princeton in 2007. More information is available at the Festival website: <http://music2.princeton.edu/AHS/>. The Editor plans to publish the detailed program in the Winter 2012 issue of the Newsletter, but please make plans now to attend.

— Graydon Beeks

TESEO
CHICAGO OPERA THEATER
APRIL-MAY 2012

The spring 2012 season sees the end of the thirteen-year tenure of Brian Dickie as General Director at the Chicago Opera Theater. During this time Dickie has produced a steady diet of Baroque and modern operas that have successfully complemented for Chicago audiences the more standard offerings at Chicago Lyric. Lovers of early music have had a chance to see all three extant Monteverdi operas, Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* in combination with Dibdin's *The Padlock*, and Handel pieces that included *Acis and Galatea*, *Semele* and *La Resurrezione* as well as *Agrippina*, *Orlando* and *Teseo*.¹ Over these years Dickie has also found for his audiences an impressive array of up-and-coming singers and designers who, though not yet of the star quality found at the Lyric (some of them are now), often possessed the spark and inventiveness to present moving drama as well as good music. COT has taken optimal advantage of Chicago's stable of early music performers and capitalized on the presence of Jane Glover, who has also been Music Director of Chicago's Music of the Baroque. Dickie also oversaw COT's move in 2004 from the old Athenaeum Theater in northwest Chicago to the newly built Harris Theater at the upper end of Millennium Park with a splendid production of *L'incoronazione di Poppea*. The Harris Theater lacks the baroque intimacy of the Athenaeum and is, in this reviewer's view, a profoundly ugly structure, inside and out. Its auditorium is, however, quite a functional space, and the acoustics are vastly better than those of the Athenaeum. One can now sit in the balcony and hear without difficulty every note from the gambist and lutenist in the pit. The COT has consistently given us, as its own advertising slogan of a couple of years ago claimed, Opera Less Ordinary. It has been a good run.

During the last three years Dickie and COT produced a trilogy of operas that traced the mythical history of Medea, beginning with Cavalli's *Giasone* in 2010, Charpentier's *Medée* in 2011, and this year's *Teseo*. Since *Teseo* and Shostakovich's *Moscow*,

¹ Reviewed in this Newsletter, Summer 2002 (*Semele*), Summer 2003 (*Agrippina*), Spring 2005 (*La resurrezione*) and Summer 2008 (*Orlando*).

Cheryomushki were Brian Dickie's farewell pieces, I was hoping that stops would be pulled out, and we would be treated to a production such as we saw in *Poppea*. I did not see the Shostakovich, so I can't speak to that. I saw opening night of *Teseo*, April 21st, and I am sorry to report disappointment. This may partly be the opera itself, which takes an act or so to get going, and has not quite the same spark as *Agrippina* or *Rinaldo*, but there was also in this production a combination of design, stage direction and musicianship that failed to thrill.

The set was designed by François-Pierre Couture, the costumes by James Darrah who also was stage director, and lighting by Julian Pike. At stage right three tall off-white screens could swivel to provide entry onto the stage. They were translucent, so back-lighting projected the shadow of entering characters to good effect. Creams and browns dominated the set, with dark red leaves scattered around, suggesting both autumn and blood. In the first half of the opera, heavy wooden tables held lustral basins and pitchers, in which the water later became blood when Medea failed to get her way with the young Theseus and things turned unpleasant. During intermission the tables disappeared, and a different scattering of the blood-leaves and formless mounds of earth suggested the out of doors. Simple costumes of indeterminate time period—a mix of turn-of-the-last century with classical Greek—were in the same cream and brown color scheme. Medea wore a dark red gown that contrasted with the more neutral costumes of the other characters. Lighting was consistently in the same shades of off-white to amber (not always successfully illuminating the singers). The production design was extremely tasteful, elegant, and functional, and perfect if you were dramatizing the *fin de siècle* angst of Ibsen or Chekhov.

But *Teseo* is a magic opera by Handel, adapted from a *tragédie lyrique* by Lully at a moment of rapprochement with France. In the course of the opera, the libretto's stage directions—and Handel's music that sets them—call for an offstage battle, a triumphal march and procession of Theseus; set changes invoked by Medea that bring on a horrid desert full of frightful monsters and an underworld with Furies. Medea descends, first in a cloud, and at the end in a chariot drawn by flying dragons while attempting to burn Athens to the ground. The chaos is dispelled by Minerva descending in a machine.

Instead of all this, we got chandeliers, sometimes sitting unlit on the stage, and sometimes lit and slowly raised when Medea sang her enchantments. This was a gimmick brought over from previous productions: in *Orlando* there were levitating light bulbs, and in Charpentier's *Medée* there were chandeliers in crystal and gold boxes. I confess I didn't find them persuasive in those productions either as a suggestion of supernatural activity. Late in the action Medea raised her two murdered and decomposing children out of the earthen mounds and led them offstage, which was creepily effective if not quite relevant to this opera. The crucial moment when Egeo identifies Theseus as his son as he recognizes the sword the young hero carries, and dashes Medea's poisoned cup from Theseus' hand, is a relatively quick sequence in recitative, but the staging did nothing to point it up or clarify what was happening. There was no Minerva to save the day—the cast defeated Medea's destructiveness by surrounding her and singing the final *tutti* as a counter spell.

Realities of operatic budgets may well forbid actual descending clouds and flying dragons, but in this brave new world of computer generated effects it is surely possible to create wonder without breaking the bank. I am thinking of a terrific Monteverdi *Orfeo* in Halle in 2007 that created upper and lower worlds with a rotating stage and projections on the back wall, or the *Giasone* at the COT itself that was set in a joyously tacky, James-Bond-like Venice. *Teseo* is an opera in which there is fairly limited tessitura—all the voices are in the soprano and alto ranges except that of the priest of Minerva at the end that this production eliminated—and I, at least, wanted some sort of variety to compensate; for me the spare range of color in the set design, costumes and lighting simply reinforced the narrow vocal range. The orchestra led by Michael Beattie, under-rehearsed on opening night, was polite to Handel's music, but this is an opera where a little rudeness is called for to highlight Medea's angry transports or the desperation of Agilea and Teseo.

Renée Tatum as Medea did the role credit, but her voice was too nice, and lacked the dominating power needed at her entry in the second act ("Dolce riposo," II.i) or her enraged "Dunque per vendicarmi" (V.i). Cecelia Hall's Teseo was fine but did not stand out with any heroic force. Manuela Bisceglie as Agilea made more of an impression,

especially with her lilting "Deh, v'aprite, o luci belli" (IV.iii), and in spite of being made to lie down a good deal while she was singing. It was the supporting musicians who really made their mark: The continuo group, consisting of harpsichord, cello, bass, theorbo and baroque guitar, engaged in a vigorous dialogue with the singers that was missing with the full band. The roles of Egeo (Gerald Thompson), and especially the secondary lovers Arcano (David Trudgeon) and Clizia (Deanna Breiwick) were sung and acted with energy and conviction that livened up the proceedings considerably.

So perhaps I am being ungrateful. COT gave us *Teseo*, an unusual offering, even in opera companies willing to produce Handel, and there were enough good things to make many in its audience happy. Anyway a lot of them stood up at the end on opening night, and two of my colleagues at Iowa who saw subsequent performances enjoyed themselves. With the company under new direction by Andreas Mitisek, it is unclear whether early opera will get the same consistent representation that it has had in the last baker's dozen of years: COT's 2013 season will present Glass, Piazzolla and Verdi. It is indeed good news that the Haymarket Opera Company, a new group devoted to bringing seventeenth- and eighteenth-century works to the Chicago area, opens its first season this fall with *Clori, Tirsi e Fileno* (www.haymarketopera.org).

— Robert Ketterer
University of Iowa

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The Editor welcomes comments, contributions,
and suggestions for future issues.

REPORT FROM HALLE 2012

The Handel Festival in Halle, together with its affiliated scholarly conference, was organized this year around the theme of “Handel and the Confessions.” This theme was chosen to coincide with the “Year of Music” in the ongoing decade-long celebration of the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther’s initiation of the Reformation. The connection to this theme was especially strong in the conference, which enjoyed co-sponsorship from the Franckesche Stiftungen, and in excursions to Wittenberg and Eisleben, cities with strong connections to Luther. The year 2012 also marks the 300th anniversary of the death of Friedrich Wilhelm Zachow, Handel’s teacher and Music Director of the Marktkirche in Halle from 1684-1712, and his music was featured in a number of contexts. There were also special exhibitions in the Franckesche Stiftungen and the Händel-Haus. As usual, there were too many events for one person to attend them all, but I will try to give a sense of my experience.

The official opening of the Handel Festival, with its attendant speeches, took place at 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, 31 May before an invited audience in the foyer of the Georg-Friedrich-Händel Halle. This was followed at 8:00 p.m. by a concert in the hall itself given by the Handel Festival Orchestra under the direction of their music director, the violinist Bernhard Forck. The guest soloist was mezzo soprano Bernarda Fink who sang Irene’s three arias from *Theodora*, together with Vivaldi’s motet *Invicti bellate*, RV 628, Pergolesi’s late setting of the *Salve Regina* and Handel’s recitative and aria *Ah, che troppo ineguali / O del ciel Maria regina*, HWV 230. The balance with the orchestra was not always ideal and one wondered whether it was caused by the acoustics of the hall or whether some of the music lay badly in her voice. The *Salve Regina* and Irene’s “Lord to thee each night and day,” sung as an encore, were particularly effective, however, and there was much to admire in her serious and committed engagement with the music. The orchestra, which played well throughout, also presented Handel’s Organ Concerto in F Major, HWV 295 (“The Cuckoo and the Nightingale”) with soloist Michaela Hasselt, and the Concerto in D Minor, Op. 3 Number 11 from Vivaldi’s *L’estro armonico*.

On Friday I heard the performance of *Messiah*, HWV 56, given in the Marktkirche by the Dunedin Consort and Players under the direction of John Butt. The soloists, among whom the bass Matthew Brook was particularly outstanding, appropriately joined in singing the choruses. The conductor made a particular point of connecting the movements within the individual “scenes.” Although a couple of the tempos seemed excessively fast, the performance made a good case for the Dublin version and the absence of oboes, which were added for some later versions, was not noticeable.

On Saturday evening there was a concert performance of *Porro, Re dell’ Indie* in the Georg-Friedrich-Händel Halle given by the Kammerorchester Basel under the direction of the rather flamboyant baroque violinist Enrico Onofri who inappropriately conducted the recitatives with his bow and added unnecessary violin solos. The principal singers were Franco Fagioli as an unstylish Porro; Veronica Cangemi as a dramatically viable Cleofide who had an annoying habit of not singing in the center of the pitch; James Gilchrist as a forthright Alessandro; and Sonia Prina, dispatching her coloratura with aplomb, as Erissena. Somehow the whole was less than the sum of its parts, but exactly why was not entirely clear to me. The majority of the audience responded with great enthusiasm.

On Sunday morning I attended the Festival Church Service in the Dom during which the Hallesche Kantorei and the Chamber Orchestra of the Martin Luther University under the direction of Maik Gruchenberg (who also sang the bass aria) presented Zachow’s cantata for the Feast of the Ascension, *Siehe ich bin bei euch alle Tage*, the text of which formed the basis of the sermon. A retiring collection was designated for the restoration of the Wäldner Organ built in 1851.

On Sunday afternoon in the Goethe Theater in Bad Lauchstädt I enjoyed the staging of *La Resurrezione*, HWV 47 by Kobie van Rensburg, which included very imaginative use of projected graphics, including the supertitles. Wolfgang Katschner led his Lautten Compagney which was blissfully shorn of percussion. Among the young singers James Elliott as San Giovanni and Falko Hönisch as Lucifero were particularly impressive.

Sunday evening brought *Alcina* in a new production at the opera house that featured soprano Romelia Lichtenstein who was honored with the title Kammersängerin after the first performance. Lichtenstein, who is the prima donna of the house and sings an extraordinary variety of roles, has contributed greatly to the Handel Festival over the years. I have often thought that she deserved to appear in a good staging of *Alcina* before her career draws to a close. Unfortunately, this was not what I had in mind, although it did manage to leave *Alcina* alone on stage at the end. As devised by Andrzej Woron, the production shortened the opera to two acts and rearranged the movements, making nonsense of the story. Even more damaging, the attempted post-colonial interpretation, with *Alcina*'s magic island portrayed as an island of pleasure frequented by hedonistic tourists, was offensive in its presentation of the indigenous island residents without shedding new light on the story. Before reading the program book I thought we might be seeing a version of *Alcina* with Ruggiero as a Peter Pan figure and that interpretation might have made more sense; at least it would have explained why Oronte was dressed as a pirate.

Musically things were much better. Lichtenstein, when she was allowed to do so by the staging, was a convincing *Alcina*, although it was clear that she had to work hard for some of the musical effects that used to come more

easily. The countertenor Terry Wey was excellent as Ruggiero, as was Bettina Ranch as his betrothed Bradamante. Ines Lex seemed to me to be much more successful as Morgana than she had been last year in *Ottone*, which may be another indication of how under-written the role of Teofane is. Ki-Hyun Park as Melisso again revealed a remarkable bass voice, and Andreas Karasiak displayed a flexible if not especially pleasant voice as Oronte. Jeffrey Kim turned in a stellar performance as Oberto. This was the first time I had seen that role, originally written for the boy William Savage, taken by a countertenor. The orchestra played well, again under the direction of Bernhard Forck. Unfortunately, someone had not only delivered an organ to pit by mistake but had also delivered the percussion that one had feared might have been featured in the Lautten Compagney performance of *La Resurrezione* at Bad Lauchstädt. It was no more appropriate in *Alcina*.

Monday morning saw the beginning of the three-day conference on the theme of Handel and the Confessions. The first day took place in the auditorium at the Händel-Haus while the sessions on Tuesday and Wednesday were held in the Englischer Saal of the Franckesche Stiftungen. Several members of the AHS presented papers, including John Roberts who spoke about the origin of Handel's motet *Silete venti*; Annette Landgraf who described the different musical genres used in *Israel in Egypt*; and Stephen Nissenbaum who related how performing *Messiah* became a Christmas tradition in England and America. In addition, Kathrin Eberl-Ruf described the surviving sources for the music of Zachow, Donald Burrows spoke about Handel and the English Chapel Royal, Matthew Gardner discussed Handel's use of borrowed material in his Wedding Anthems, and I surveyed the selection of texts used in the Cannons Anthems.

On Monday evening the Rheinische Kantorei and Das Kleine Konzert under the direction of Hermann Max presented a program of music by Zachow and Handel in the Marktkirche. Four cantatas by the former gave a sense of how cleverly he was able to tailor his compositions to the church's resonant acoustic, with broad and generally homophonic gestures for the choir and clear-cut arias for the soloists. The fugues, when they appeared, were also surprisingly effective and clearly Zachow was an appropriate teacher for the

SPECIAL OFFERS FROM THE AMERICAN HANDEL SOCIETY

The American Handel Society is offering sets of back issues of the *Newsletter* for the price of \$10 per year (three issues each), going back to the first year, 1986. All volumes are available, but some numbers are in short supply. We reserve the right to supply photocopies of individual numbers where necessary. In addition, the AHS has a limited number of copies of *Handel and the Harris Circle* at the price of \$7. This attractive and important booklet, written by Rosemary Dunhill, provides a useful introduction to the rich Harris family archive, recently deposited at the Hampshire Record Office in Winchester and discussed by Donald Burrows in the December 1996 issue of the *Newsletter*. For further details, contact the *Newsletter* Editor.

young Handel. His imaginative scoring was also highlighted, with a texture of three oboes and bassoon featured in *Ruhe, Friede, Freud und Wonne* and a harp being prominent in *Herr, wenn ich nur dich habe*. Handel was represented by *Dixit Dominus*, much of which was taken too fast for my taste in the currently popular manner. The duet “De Torrente in via bibet” was, however, stunningly sung by Veronika Winter and Verena Gropper with the men of the chorus, and the concert as a whole was musically satisfying.

Wednesday evening saw a performance of *Joshua*, again in the Marktkirche, which many of us thought the highlight of the festival. The RIAS Kammerchor and the Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin, under the direction of Hans-Christoph Rademann, were joined by an outstanding group of soloists in a performance that conveyed the excitement of the work and made one willing to excuse the weaknesses of the libretto. Among the soloists bass Roderick Williams as Caleb and alto Wiebke Lehmkuhl as Othniel were particularly outstanding, the latter displaying an remarkable command of English diction. Tenor Thomas Hobbs was a slightly monochromatic Joshua, but that is written into the part, while soprano Elizabeth Watts was particularly appealing in her forthright and communicative delivery of Achsah’s music.

I am afraid that I missed the two gala concerts, the first by Vassilina Kassanova and the second by Philippe Jaroussky and Marie-Nicole Lemieux, as well as those given by pianist Ragna Schirmer (the recipient of the Handel Prize for this year) and the Le Concert des Nations under the direction of Jordi Savall. There were also rare performances of

Alessandro Scarlatti’s oratorio *Il Martirio di Santa Teodosia* and of Handel’s *L’Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato* in the arrangement by Robert Franz which conflicted with other events. Still to come when I left were the much-anticipated staging of *Terpsicore* at Bad Lauchstädt with Les Talens Lyrique and Les Fêtes galantes under the musical direction of Christoph Rousset, and a program of works by Lully and Handel performed by the MDR Rundfunkchor and B’Rock, a baroque orchestra from Ghent, under the direction of Howard Arman.

Next year’s Handel Festival and Conference will take place a week later than this year, from 6-17 June, and the theme will be “Power and Music.” The program is scheduled to feature staged performances of *Almira*, *Alessandro* and the 1732 version of *Acis and Galatea*; concert performances of *Messiah*, *Judas Maccabaeus*, *Giulio Cesare* and the Utrecht Te Deum and Jubilate; concerts featuring Christine Schäfer, Magdalena Kožená and Roberta Invernizzi; and a variety of chamber concerts in interesting venues, including the courtyard of the Moritzburg, the Patronatskirche in Ostrau, and the Dom in Merseburg. Tickets are expected to be available in November or early December.

— Graydon Beeks

2009 SERWER LECTURE PUBLISHED

Prof. Robert Ketterer’s Serwer Lecture, “London as Athens: *Teseo and Arianna in Creta*” (see AHS Newsletter, Winter 2010) has been published as “Helpings from the Great Banquet of Epics: Handel’s *Teseo and Arianna in Creta*” in Bruno Forment, ed. *(Dis)embodying Myths in Baroque Opera: Multidisciplinary Reflections*, Leuven: Leuven University Press, pp. 33-61.

Congratulations!

DALE HIGBEE HONORED AT CONCERT

In 2011, after twenty-three seasons of organizing, directing and performing Carolina Baroque programs, Dale Higbee announced his retirement. A long-time member of the American Handel Society and a well known presence at Handel conferences, Dr. Higbee was the guest of honor at a concert given by the Carolina Baroque on August 5 in Salisbury, North Carolina. The concert featured the music of Handel and personal tributes and presentations.

The American Handel Society joins Dale’s friends and colleagues in congratulating him for over two decades of devoted service to the music of Handel and other Baroque composers.

Congratulations, *ad multos annos!*

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* - This organization does not have a reduced rate for retirees.

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Payments in dollars for GFH or HI memberships must be received before 1 June.

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