

NEWSLETTER

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REPORT FROM HALLE

The theme of this year's Handel Festival in Halle was "Handel and his Interpreters," and for the first time it extended over three weekends, running from May 30 to June 14. The meetings of the Editorial Board of the Hallische Händel-Ausgabe and the G.F. Händel-Gesellschaft took place at the end of the first week and the scholarly conference at the beginning of the following week, so I cannot report on the Opening Concert and the other performances that followed on the first weekend. Next year the meetings and conference will revert to their earlier placement around the first weekend, but the Festival will continue in its expanded format.

The first performance I attended was the Festival Concert by the French countertenor Philippe Jaroussky, winner of this year's Handel Prize of the City of Halle presented by the Handel House Foundation. In this program of arias and instrumental works the singer was partnered by the ensemble Orfeo 55 under the direction of the well-known contralto Nathalie Stutzmann, who also joined in as a singer – most memorably at the end of the program when the two performed the duet for Cornelia and Sexto from *Giulio Cesare* as an encore. Jaroussky sang mostly unfamiliar arias from *Parnasso in festa*, *Deidamia*, *Aci*, *Galatea e Polifemo*, and *Arianna in Creta* and displayed a mastery of his craft. The instrumental movements, taken largely from concerti grossi, were led with skill by Stutzmann although some of the playing was a little wild. She has clearly undertaken a study of conducting, with the result that she displays an efficient baton technique rather than the excessive flailing of arms too often seen from converted performers.

Friday brought the premiere of this year's new production at the Halle Opera House, which was of *Lucio Cornelio Silla*, utilizing performing material derived from the newest volume of the HHA, an edition of the opera by Terence Best. Because the opera is relatively short it was decided to perform it without intermission; at two hours, it was just at the edge of endurance. The story of the Roman tyrant Silla was set in what the video projections identified as the Mussolini era, with no great loss or gain to the story. The revolving set was used effectively to keep the action moving and all the singing and acting were strong. It was perhaps a mistake to undercut Silla's

HANDEL IN *THE HARMONICON*

The British music periodical *The Harmonicon* (1823–33) provides an effective platform for surveying the nation's musical life in the early nineteenth century. Each monthly issue included two primary sections. The first comprised a series of wide-ranging articles, touching on historical studies, music theory, and other miscellaneous topics. The second section, printed music, contained special commissions or arrangements by the magazine's editor, William Ayrton. Each issue also supplied announcements of upcoming concerts and festivals as well as reviews of recent performances. The journal's coverage of London and the provinces demonstrated its commitment to recording events nationwide.

The figure of Handel loomed large throughout *The Harmonicon's* years of publication. The journal devoted considerable space to promotions and reviews of the Three Choirs Festival, the provincial music festivals, and the Concerts of Ancient Music, all of which featured Handel's music. *The Harmonicon* also printed a Handel biography during its first year (No. 9, September 1823). Written under the title "Memoir of George Frederick Handel," this anonymous article largely assembled anecdotes from three prior English biographies of the composer, often recycling the material word-for-word without attribution. These sources include John Mainwaring's *Memoirs of the Life of the Late George Frederic Handel* (1760), John Hawkins's biography in *A General History of the Science and Practice of Music* (1776), and Charles Burney's "Sketch of the Life of Handel," which appeared in *An Account of the Musical Performances in Westminster Abbey...In Commemoration of Handel* (1785). The real significance of these borrowings emerges when we read closely the content of these passages and consider the image of Handel that they transmit. Handel's eighteenth-century biographers ascribed characteristics to the composer that rendered him an ideal embodiment of British national identity. By adopting their descriptions and anecdotes, *The Harmonicon* did not simply reprint others' words but renewed and affirmed their

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last-minute retirement to private life. Unmotivated as it seems, it was what happened to the historical Silla and it concluded the libretto as set by Handel. Filippo Mineccia was outstanding in the lead role, conveying the menace and authority of the tyrant convincingly. Romelia Lichtenstein as his wife, Metella, found a role that suited her somewhat over-the-top histrionics and she sang extremely well. Ines Lex was affecting as the put-upon Flavia, although she could justifiably have submitted a complaint about some unflattering costumes. The rest of the cast acquitted itself with distinction. The Händelfestspielorchester Halle played very well under the direction of Enrico Onofri and for once there was neither an organ nor a percussion instrument in the pit.

At the Membership Meeting of the G.F. Händel-Gesellschaft on Saturday morning, I presented greetings from the AHS. Gert Richter was recognized for his long service as Assistant Director of the Händel-Haus and wished well in his upcoming retirement. In the election that concluded the meeting, Wolfgang Hirschmann was again chosen President and Hanna John, Terence Best, and Donald Burrows returned as Vice Presidents, as did Annette Landgraf as Wissenschaftlicher Sekretär and Konstanze Musketa as Beisitzer. The new Vorstand also includes AHS members John Roberts, Matthew Gardner, Wolfgang Ruf, and myself.

Sunday afternoon brought a concert performance of *Imeneo* in the version Handel created for Dublin in 1742. This eliminates almost the entire role of Clomiri, sister to the heroine Rosmene and secretly in love with Rosmene's suitor Tirinto, presumably because the composer could not find an appropriate singer in the Irish capitol. To compensate, Handel added the wonderful duet "Per le porte del tormento" from *Sosarme* at the end as a duet for Rosmene and Tirinto after the former has chosen Imeneo, who rescued her from pirates, as her husband. The original version is more convincing both dramatically and musically, but it was nice to hear the Dublin version, especially performed by such a good cast. The real star was mezzo-soprano Ann Hallenberg, who gave a truly commanding performance in the alto castrato role of the suffering Tirinto. Tenor Magnus Staveland was suitably bluff as Imeneo, and Fabrizio Beggi was convincing in the bass role of Argenio, father to Rosmene. As Rosmene, soprano Monica Piccinini seemed not to fully inhabit the role, which resulted in a lack of communication with the audience and occasional waywardness of pitch.

Monday marked the beginning of the three-day scholarly conference, also on the theme of "Handel and his Interpreters." There were a number of papers given by members of the AHS, including John Roberts, Donald Burrows, Matthew Gardner, and myself, and other papers given by a distinguished group of scholars from Great Britain, Germany, and South Africa. The conference began with the presentation of the G.F. Händel-Gesellschaft Research Prize to Regina Compton for her recently completed Ph.D. dissertation on Handel's secco recitatives. This was followed by a lecture on the subject by Dr. Compton, who had received a J. Merrill Knapp Research Fellowship from the AHS in 2012 to support her dissertation research. This example of cooperation among the different Handel societies to support the efforts of young scholars is very encouraging.

The high point of the Festival for me came on Friday evening with a performance of *Semele* in the Georg-Friedrich-Händel Halle given by a distinguished group of soloists under the direction of Ivor Bolton. The title role was sung by soprano Carolyn Sampson, who was at the top of her game. Her voice is beautiful, her coloratura dazzling, and her characterization utterly convincing. Susan Bickley successfully distinguished between the music of Ino, Semele's sister, and Juno, her rival for Jupiter's affections, although some of it seemed to lie uncomfortably low for her. Tenor James Gilchrist seemed vocally out of sorts, but still gave a convincing performance as Jupiter, both musically and dramatically. Lawrence

Zazzo was excellent in the countertenor role of Athamus, who is abandoned by Semele in her pursuit of "endless pleasures, endless love" with Jupiter and a possible transformation into a goddess. The role lies low for him as well, but his ornamentation was appropriately enthusiastic and for once he was allowed to sing all his music. Andrew Foster-Williams, singing the bass roles of Cadmus, the High Priest, and the god Somnus, was very impressive, and soprano Ruby Hughes completed the cast in the role of Iris, assistant to Juno. The Collegium Vocale Gent produced a soft-grained tone of great beauty and impeccable intonation, but could have contributed a more dramatic presence. Concerto Köln played very well, although the keyboard player should have been at the organ rather than the harpsichord during the choruses and the archlute/theorbo was unnecessary, though seldom distracting. Conductor Ivor Bolton clearly had sensible musical ideas about the work, but his stage department was distracting. The musical text was uncut and the performance lasted three-and-a-half hours, with an intermission after the first act and a tuning pause after the second. This is a better plan than placing a single intermission in the middle of the second act, but a second intermission would be an even better solution.

The final performance I saw was of the pasticcio *Semiramide* at the Goethe-Theater in Bad Lauchstädt. Handel had apparently acquired a manuscript of arias from Leonardo Vinci's 1729 setting of that popular libretto by Pietro Metastasio and prepared it for performance in the 1733/34 season by transposing a number of Vinci's arias for singers of different voice ranges; composing new recitatives; and rewriting one of Vinci's arias. What we heard in Halle derived from a production devised by Alan Curtis for Vienna in which most of Vinci's music (recitatives and arias at their original pitches) was restored and Handel's music jettisoned. At the same time, some arias by Nicola Porpora, Leonardo Leo, and Francesco Feo, which had been added to accommodate Handel's new castrato Carestini, were retained because Curtis found them to be superior to Vinci's originals. Regardless of how one feels about Curtis's arguments, the resulting pasticcio seemed a curious thing to present at a Handel Festival.

This production of *Semiramide* was apparently a huge success in Vienna, although it was difficult to see why. The music was effective and well-written without being striking or emotionally gripping. It was staged as a variation of the "Dating Game" from the old days of American television, which neither enhanced nor clarified the story. The young singers, most of whom had also appeared in Vienna, sang and acted effectively, and the Bach Consort Wien played with style under the direction of Rubén Dubrovsky. All told it was a puzzling but not unpleasant experience, and for once the cooler weather made the little historic theater comfortable. As a curious footnote, neither of the productions at Bad Lauchstädt this year produced the subtitles that were promised.

As always there were numerous concerts I was unable to attend. Those that seemed to elicit the most excited response were the Festival Concerts by Nathalie Stutzmann, Christine Schäfer, Maria Cristina Kiehr, and Roberta Invernizzi, each focusing on music written for a specific Handel performer. Good reports were also heard about a chamber music program given by the London Handel Players and an open-air performance of the *Music for the Royal Fireworks* by the Zefiro Barockorchester.

Next year's festival, on the theme of "History – Myth – Enlightenment," will run from May 27 to June 12, 2016 and will feature performances of *Sosarme*, *Messiah*, *Acis and Galatea*, *Belshazzar*, *Ode for St. Cecilia's Day*, and the Coronation Anthems, together with the Handel pasticcios *Didone abbandonata* and *Catone*. There will also be Festival Concerts by Romelia Lichtenstein, Anna Prohaska and Giovanni Antonini, and Ian Bostridge, plus programs of chamber music, improvisation, and popular music. Tickets should go on sale in December 2015.

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

On my last day in London this summer I had the good fortune to attend a preview of an outstanding exhibition at the Handel House Museum curated by Ellen Harris and entitled "Handel: A Life With Friends." Based on her recent book of the same name, the exhibition includes items related to Handel's friends, on loan from national, local, and private collections. Many of these items are rarely if ever seen in public. Most striking to me was the musical conversation piece by Hogarth depicting the members of the Wesley Family – later to change the name to Wellesley – and their friend Mrs. Anne Donnellan, who was also a friend of Handel. Other items include a Handel manuscript from the Malmesbury Collection, a manuscript keyboard book dated 1704 that belonged to Elizabeth Mayne, an example of Mrs. Delany's remarkable paper flowers, and other treasures that will repay close viewing. I urge members of the AHS who find themselves in London between now and January 10, 2016 to make every effort to visit the Handel House Museum and enjoy meeting Mr. Handel's friends.

This is a good time for those of us who are particularly fond of Handel's *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato*, which I discussed in the last issue of this *Newsletter*. Novello has recently issued Donald Burrows' new edition of the work, and a piano/vocal score could be the perfect gift for a favorite Handelian. In addition, Winged Lion and Signum Records have released a new recording of the work by the Gabrielli Consort and Players under the direction of Paul McCreech that attempts to recreate the version of the first performance of the work in February 27, 1740 – the first recording to do so. The extensive booklet includes a perceptive note by Ruth Smith and a provocative conversation between Dr. Smith and the conductor. A companion gift, perhaps?

Members of the AHS will have been saddened to hear of the death of Alan Curtis on July 15, 2015 in Florence, Italy where he had lived for many years. Many of us knew him personally, either through his teaching at the University of California, Berkeley, or through his activities as a brilliant and instinctive performer. He first achieved notice for his work on French and Italian baroque music, most notably the keyboard music of Louis Couperin and the operas of Rameau and Monteverdi as well as madrigals by a host of composers. In recent years he had focused increasingly on the operas of Handel and his Italian contemporaries, and he leaves a legacy of splendid recordings with his orchestra Il Complesso Barocco, including (in no particular order) *Ariodante*, *Alcina*, *Lotario*, *Rodrigo*, *Berenice*, *Deidamia*, and many more. His contagious enthusiasm, prodigious energy and musical insights will be sorely missed.

— Graydon Beeks

EMMANUELLE HAÏM IN LOS ANGELES

In April of this year, the renowned conductor Emmanuelle Haïm collaborated with members of the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra in a program consisting of Spring and Summer from Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons* as well as excerpts from Handel's *Giulio Cesare*. The program, ostensibly designed to draw a wide audience of listeners with the programming of the Vivaldi, appealed as well to connoisseurs of opera, thus exposing those less familiar with Handel's work the rare opportunity to hear his music performed by some of his most capable and ardent practitioners.

Vivaldi's Spring and Summer were sensitively rendered both by the chamber orchestra and soloist. Under Haïm's direction, fresh musical light was cast on works that have been recorded and performed perhaps more than any other pieces of their time. Subtlety and nuance abounded in the interpretative choices made by conductor and players, particularly in passages with repetitive phrases and tonal sequences. Haïm brought a young violinist, Stéphanie-Marie Degand to play Vivaldi's two concertos. Degand's florid technique was heightened by her energetic physical interaction with other members of the violin section as she alternately strolled, turned, and faced the violin section while playing with the ensemble. Haïm's subtle gestures and conducting from the harpsichord allowed audience members to experience the joyful intimacy of a musical group communicating directly and spontaneously with each other.

In her pre-concert interview (heard April 11), Haïm discussed her concept of offering a scaled-down version of Handel's *Giulio Cesare* within a non-staged setting. She commented on how she had intentionally chosen a group of recitatives and arias from *Giulio Cesare* in order to provide a broad narrative of the story while simultaneously showcasing the artistry of the two soloists. Christophe Dumaux (countertenor) and Natalie Dessay (soprano) sang the roles of Caesar and Cleopatra with great characterization and drama and the Disney Hall audience was clearly entranced. Dessay, though retired from the opera stage for several years, retains the charisma of her stage career and imbued each phrase of music with intensity of expression. Dumaux proved an assertive and confident Caesar with a lilting countertenor voice that blended exquisitely with Dessay's.

During intermission, John Lenti, the superb theorbo player from Seattle held court on the stage as curious audience members plied him with questions about his instrument and its history. Lenti is a kind and generous musician with whom I have had the good fortune to become acquainted in the last year. His patience in answering the same questions repeatedly with aplomb and intelligence struck me as exemplary; the future of early music will most certainly be well-served through the educative efforts of Lenti, Haïm, and others of their ilk. The resonant acoustics of the Disney Hall in tandem with the sensitive playing of the chamber orchestra allowed the theorbo as well as harpsichord to be gratifyingly well-heard as part of the evening's continuo group.

— Helen Farson

ideas about Handel as a national hero.

Before discussing passages from *The Harmonicon*, we should first consider the three prior models and some relevant circumstances of their creation. John Mainwaring published his *Memoirs* only a year after Handel's death. Concluding the biographical section, Mainwaring wrote that his aim was "to give the Reader those parts of his character, as a Man, that any way tend to open and explain his character as an Artist."¹ What are those parts of his character? I have elsewhere grouped Mainwaring's descriptions of the composer into six categories.² According to Mainwaring, Handel was adventurous and desired to see the world; Handel was independent and loved liberty; Handel was a Protestant; Handel enjoyed divine protection; Handel was morally upright; and Handel was a musical genius whose talent overwhelmed continental composers. In short, Mainwaring revealed an image of Handel in which the composer embodied the same characteristics that many Britons identified as belonging to the nation itself.

John Hawkins's five-volume *A General History* included the next major Handel biography. Besides relaying a chronological narrative similar to Mainwaring's, Hawkins also reiterated many of the same character traits as his predecessor. Some of these were implicit in the anecdotes themselves, although Hawkins selected a few for special emphasis. His description of Handel as "a man of blameless morals" who possessed a "solid and rational piety" displayed the composer as a model of British mainstream orthodoxy.³ Hawkins also promoted the idea that Handel's genius flowed from an innate source, and downplayed the influence of his far-flung travels.

Charles Burney's "Sketch of the Life of Handel" appeared in 1785, a year after the successful Handel Commemoration at Westminster Abbey. Burney's efforts carried a special challenge: as the official chronicler of the Commemoration, he felt pressure from King George III to produce a laudatory account of an event that was as much political and patriotic as it was musical. Like his predecessors, Burney asserted a sympathetic connection between Handel's music and English tastes. He also supplemented his writing with illustrations that affirmed the Handel myth through a conglomeration of potent imagery. One portrays the composer at work, a symbolic lyre resting near his feet. He stares upward in inspiration, pausing in mid-composition as a winged "Genius of Harmony" crowns his head with laurel and a cherub carries his name to Heaven.⁴

Turning now to *The Harmonicon*, a few side-by-side comparisons with the earlier models will demonstrate the close degree of correspondence—and the prolongation of Handel's mythic image into the nineteenth century. The author borrowed the least from Mainwaring, primarily using childhood stories that emphasized Handel's independence and musicality. For instance, Mainwaring's anecdote about the child's stubborn instance on learning music,

He had found means to get a little clavichord privately convey'd to a room at the top of the house. To this room

he constantly stole when the family was asleep. He had made some progress before Music had been prohibited, and by his assiduous practice at the hours of rest, had made such farther advances, as . . . were no slight prognostics of his future greatness,⁵

bears an uncanny resemblance to *The Harmonicon's* account:

He therefore contrived, by means of a servant, to get a little clavichord secreted in one of the attics of the house. To this he resorted every evening as soon as the family had retired to rest, and thus aided by the force of simple nature, his hand found the compass of the key-board, and his ear directed it to the production both of melody and harmony.⁶

In other cases, *The Harmonicon's* author lifted not only an approximation of the story but also the original text. Consider another passage from Mainwaring:

He [the Duke of Saxe-Weissenfels] told his physician [Handel's father], that every father must judge for himself in what manner to dispose of his children; but that, for his own part, he could not but consider it as a sort of crime against the public and posterity, to rob the world of such a rising Genius!⁷

⁵ Mainwaring, *Memoirs*, 5.

⁶ Memoir of George Frederick Handel, "The Harmonicon" 1, no. 9 (September 1823): 117.

⁷ Mainwaring, *Memoirs*, 9–10. All underlined passages in this article are highlighted for ease of comparison. They are not underlined in the original sources.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS OF NOTE

- Harris, Ellen T. "Taking the Oaths: The Directors of the Royal Academy of Music Swear Allegiance to King and Country." *Eighteenth-Century Music* 12/2 (2015): 197-210.
- Jerold, Beverly. *The Complexities of Early Instrumentation: Winds and Brass*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2015.
- . "Diderot (Part II) —Temperament and Expressive Intonation." *Music Theory & Analysis* 2/1 (2015): 69-93.
- . "Diderot (Part I) — Authorship and Illusion." *Music Theory & Analysis* 1/1&2 (2014): 38-60.
- Joncus, Berta. "The London Stage from Purcell to Pepusch." Review of *The Lively Arts of the London Stage, 1675-1725*, ed. Kathryn Lowerre. *Early Music* 43/2 (2015): 300-333.
- McGeary, Thomas. "Handel in the Dunciad: Pope, Handel, Frederick, Prince of Wales, and Cultural Politics." *The Musical Quarterly* 97/4 (2014): 542-74.
- Pink, Andrew. "Solomon, Susanna and Moses: Locating Handel's Lost Librettist." *Eighteenth-Century Music* 12/2 (2015): 211-22.
- Range, Matthias. "Handelian revisions? William Croft's Orchestrally Accompanied TeDeum and Jubilate." *The Musical Times* 156/1930 (2015): 47-72.

¹ John Mainwaring, *Memoirs of the Life of the Late George Frederic Handel* (1760; repr., Amsterdam: Frits A. M. Knuf, 1964), 142.

² Adam Shoaff, "Mainwaring's Handel *Memoirs* and the Shaping of a National Myth," *Music Research Forum* 29 (2014): 29–43.

³ John Hawkins, *A General History of the Science and Practice of Music* (1776; repub., New York: Dover Publications, 1963), 856–57.

⁴ Charles Burney, *An Account of the Musical Performances in Westminster Abbey, and the Pantheon, . . . In Commemoration of Handel* ([London], 1785), 42.

with its analogue in *The Harmonicon*:

He allowed that every father had a right to dispose of his children as he thought most expedient: but declared that in the present instance he could not but consider it as a sort of crime against the public and posterity to rob the world of such a rising genius.⁸

The Harmonicon borrowed extensively from Burney's "Sketch," going even so far as to recycle Burney's quotations, as in the following excerpt underscoring Handel's genius. First, Burney:

We now come to the busiest and most glorious period of Handel's life; who arrived at that stage of existence which Dante calls "Il mezzo del cammin di nostra vita" when the human frame and faculties have acquired their utmost strength and vigor; was endowed with great natural powers, highly improved by cultivation; with a hand which no difficulties could embarrass; a genius for composition unbounded. . . .⁹

And the corresponding passage in *The Harmonicon*'s "Memoir:"

We are now arrived at the busiest, the most glorious, and yet the most anxious, period of Handel's life. This great musician had reached that stage of existence which Dante calls, "Il mezzo del cammin di nostra vita" when the faculties have attained their utmost vigor. He was endowed with extraordinary natural powers, highly improved by cultivation; with a hand which no difficulties could embarrass; a genius original and inexhaustible.¹⁰

Finally, the author also borrowed liberally from Hawkins's portrayal. Comparing their respective concluding passages demonstrates the continuation of Handel's centrality to British music as well as British views about Handel's contribution to music in general. Hawkins wrote:

Many of the excellencies . . . he might perhaps possess in common with a few of the most eminent of his contemporaries; but . . . none were aware . . . that there is a sublime in music as there is in poetry. . . . [T]here is little reason to doubt that the many examples of this kind with which his works abound, will continue to engage the admiration of judicious hearers as long as the love of harmony shall exist.¹¹

The Harmonicon concluded similarly:

Many excellencies he might possess in common with other great musicians. . . . [H]e has given us feelingly to know that there is a sublime in music, as well as in poetry and painting. This sublimity, by which Handel's works are particularly characterized, will continue to engage the admiration of the world so long as the love of harmony itself shall exist.¹²

These excerpts represent a sampling of the parallels between *The Harmonicon*'s portrait of Handel and those of the composer's eighteenth-century biographers. Nevertheless, they demonstrate the continuation of a mythologizing process that began during Handel's life, as shown in Louis François

Roubiliac's symbolic Handel statue installed at Vauxhall Gardens in 1738.¹³ Mainwaring, Hawkins, and Burney contributed to this process with their own biographical sculptures, helping to fuel a late-century Handel resurgence that found its most spectacular expression in the Handel Commemorations. In *The Harmonicon*, we see how Britons carried this heroic image into the nineteenth century, extending the Handel revival and preparing the way for even grander celebrations during the Victorian age.

— Adam Shoaff

Adam Shoaff is a PhD candidate at the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music (CCM). His dissertation explores the aesthetic foundations for German opera in Leipzig between 1766 and 1775. Adam is currently in Berlin on a five-month research grant provided by the Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst (DAAD). This fall, Adam will be one of five Cincinnati doctoral candidates to receive the University's Dean's Fellowship, a full-year stipend supporting dissertation completion.

¹³ For more on Roubiliac's statue and its application of Orphic symbolism to Handel, see Suzanne Aspden, "'Fam'd Handel Breathing, tho' Transformed to Stone': The Composer as Monument," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 55 (2002): 39–90.

THE J. MERRILL KNAPP RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP

The Board of Directors of The American Handel Society invites applications for the J. Merrill Knapp Research Fellowship to support scholarly projects related to Handel and his world. One or more fellowships may be awarded in a calendar year up to a total of \$2,000. Requests for funding may include, but are not limited to, purchase of microfilms, travel for research, and production expenses for publication. This fellowship may be used on its own or to augment other grants or fellowships.

In awarding the Knapp Fellowship, preference will be given to graduate students, scholars in the early stages of their careers, and independent scholars with no source of institutional support.

The deadline for applications will be March 1st in even-numbered years. There is no application form. Each applicant should submit an outline of the project, a budget showing how and when the funds will be used, and a description of other funding for the same project applied for and/or received. In addition, applicants should have two letters of recommendation sent directly to the Knapp Fellowship Committee. Electronic submissions are preferred; letters of recommendation as well as the application itself can be emailed to Roger Freitas (rfreitas@esm.rochester.edu). Paper submissions can also be mailed to Professor Roger Freitas, Musicology Department, Eastman School of Music, 26 Gibbs St. Rochester, NY 14604.

⁸ "Memoir," *The Harmonicon*, 117.

⁹ Burney, *An Account . . . In Commemoration of Handel*, 13.

¹⁰ "Memoir," *The Harmonicon*, 119.

¹¹ Hawkins, *A General History*, 914.

¹² "Memoir," *The Harmonicon*, 121.

OF HEROES, LOVERS, AND CLOWNS: A REVIEW OF *ALESSANDRO* AT THE HÄNDEL-FESTSPIELE HALLE, JUNE 8, 2015

This summer, the Handel Festival in Halle welcomed a new staging of *Alessandro* (1726) at the Goethe-Theater in Bad Lauchstädt. A collaborative effort with Decca Classics, the Halle production helped to promote a newly released recording that features Max Emanuel Cenčić (Alessandro) and Xavier Sabata (Tassile) under the direction of George Petrou, all of whom appeared in Halle. Not on the Decca recording were Dilyara Idrisova (Lisaura) and Blandine Staskiewicz (Rossane).

One fact of this production is indisputable: the singers gave precise, expressive, and enthusiastic performances. Cenčić captured the arrogant heroism in Alessandro's music. He sang



Max Emanuel Cenčić as Alessandro.
Picture by Martin Kaufhold (Wiesbaden)

the part with effortless grace, but also power and boldness. Just as notably, Idrisova and Staskiewicz expertly performed the roles first created for the rival sopranos Francesca Cuzzoni and Faustina Bordoni, respectively. Offering the most inventive embellishments of the evening, Staskiewicz sang with a rich, vibrant, and pleasing voice. Nonetheless, Idrisova outdid her partner: Idrisova's vocal timbre sparkled, and her elegant phrasing and remarkable dynamic range transformed some of Handel's less memorable arias into unforgettable events. The orchestra, under Petrou, gave a largely strong performance, though not quite matching the singers. The oboists, unable to control the upper register of their instruments, disrupted the overall orchestral effect in several passages, and the cellist added a surfeit of marcato accents, leading one to wonder if a rogue percussionist had infiltrated the pit.

Lucinda Childs staged the production. Borrowing from pseudo-Brechtian theatrical theory and, it seems, Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci*, Childs obfuscated rather than enhanced the narrative action. The characters were presented as singers and dancers rehearsing an opera production. The conflicts of love and jealousy (e.g., Alessandro's romantic pursuits) occurred "off-stage" when the singers were not rehearsing; the ceremonial scenes and militaristic disputes (e.g., Alessandro's triumphant conquest of India) occurred "in rehearsal." Such a staging did not effectively communicate the plot. It also distorted the essential identities of the characters, especially Alessandro. In depicting his military achievements as theatrical fiction, Childs undermined the noble aspects of Alessandro and oversimplified one of Handel's more complex hero-lovers.

Known for her close artistic partnership with Philip Glass and Robert Wilson (*Einstein on the Beach*, 1975), Childs surprisingly

seems not to have considered the rich musical and poetic details of Handel's score. Her staging detracted from or entirely transformed what Handel gives the performers, particularly in Act 2, Scene 2. In this scene, Alessandro expresses his love to Rossane, as Lisaura overhears unseen. He then sees Lisaura and pours forth his love for her, as Rossane now listens, pretending to sleep. Naturally, Lisaura rejects Alessandro, singing back the romantic song intended for her rival, and Rossane does the same. The Halle production undid these witty musical refrains. An inebriated, lovesick Cenčić stumbled on stage, waving a bottle and hiccupping between his phrases. Providing needless slapstick comedy, Cenčić's performance served as the focal point of the scene and diverted attention from the cunning actions of Idrisova and Staskiewicz.

The most peculiar event of the Halle production occurred in Act 1, Scene 9, in an incident that Richard King (2008), Jed Wentz (2009), and I (2015) have discussed in detail. In this scene, Alessandro demands to be worshipped as an earthly ruler and a god. Clito, a general in his army, refuses, and Alessandro forces him to the ground. Wentz, King, and I disagree about the affective content and hence exact theatrical gestures of this scene, but Childs and Petrou's interpretation completely missed the mark. Childs portrayed Clito as an immature, ill-tempered hothead, though the opera suggests that he is, in fact, a respectable military leader. In his moment of disobedience, Clito, performed by Sabata, exploded: a rich bass, Sabata sang the last line of recitative in a screaming falsetto, while leaping to attack Cenčić. The continuo ensemble further contributed to the confused dramatic presentation by transforming *recitativo semplice* into *accompagnato*, unfortunately, as they did in other stretches of recitative. Throughout the opera, the cellist sustained far too many notated whole notes, and the harpsichordist—who Francesco Gasparini might have characterized as a *Sonatorono* or *Sonatorello*, roughly a "pompous" or "frivolous" performer—enthusiastically rolled chords without reserve. During Clito's confrontation, the continuo group realized the simple recitative with noisy, bombastic arpeggios, and in doing so the performers spoiled the subsequent dramatic event, a passage of accompanied recitative wherein Alessandro expresses his anger. Childs and Petrou's artistic decisions certainly made a strong effect. But such creative embellishments are entirely unnecessary: Handel provides the musical ingredients for good drama, and his score does not require supplementary material.

Alessandro will reappear at the Handel Festival in Halle in 2016. For those who cannot attend, my recommendation follows: buy the Decca recording and listen with headphones on and eyes closed, imagining the gestures and actions on your own.

— Regina Compton

NEWSLETTER OF THE AMERICAN HANDEL SOCIETY

The Newsletter is published three times a year (Spring, Summer, and Winter). The editor welcomes submissions in the following categories for future issues:

- Short articles (1500-2000 words)
- Reviews of performances and recordings of Handel's music
- News of awards and honors presented to members of the Society
- News of recent publications on Handel-related topics
- Abstracts for dissertations in progress on Handel-related topics

Please submit your contributions to the editor, Minji Kim (minjik@gmail.com)

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