

NEWSLETTER

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REFLECTIONS ON THE SOURCES AND STAGING OF *SEMELE*

Mark Risinger

My interest in preparing the forthcoming HHA edition of *Semele* originated over a couple of summers in the mid-1990s, during the time I spent studying Handel's autograph and completing research for my dissertation. I had fallen in love with the music some time before, thanks to recordings by John Nelson and others: from the opening bars, the music captures the listener's imagination and reflects the turbulent nature of the story about to unfold, and I had already been completely drawn in by the succession of beautiful moments Handel creates as *Semele* ascends to near-immortality and then becomes the victim of her own rashness and folly.

Encountering the manuscript sources firsthand, however, opened up a whole new realm of appreciation and affection. As happens to most of us, I suspect, when we first confront a Handel autograph, the overwhelming thrill of sitting in the presence of so rare and precious an object meant that it took some time before I was able to calm down and observe closely enough to accomplish any real "work" on it. Several aspects of the *Semele* autograph make it particularly interesting, the most important being that it has not yet (as of this writing) been subjected to modern conservation but is still in its late-18th-century binding, with red leather spine and beautifully marbled papers. Even more exciting was the discovery that Handel had made such extensive cancellations and corrections as he composed that he removed entire folios, most of which are now bound in other manuscripts in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. To the stubs of paper left by the removal of these single leaves, he attached replacements using large blobs of red wax that are still there and fully visible. There is something about the three-dimensionality of this wax, even more than the paper and ink on which it is fixed, that brought Handel to life for me as a living and working individual. I found (and continue to find) it absolutely mesmerizing. The dates at the end of each of the three Acts give one a sense of the usual rapid pace at which Handel was working in the summer of 1743, even more impressive given his discarding and rewriting of certain large numbers and altering the role of Athamas from tenor clef to alto at an advanced stage of composition. Numerous original stage directions and scene

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REPORT FROM HALLE

Graydon Beeks



Because the Handel Festival in Halle now stretches over three weekends, it is not always possible to schedule the Handel Conference and the various meetings that precede it to coincide with the opening festivities. This year the meetings took place at the end of the first full week and the Conference at the beginning of the second full week. Matters were further complicated by the fact that the Sunday of the second weekend was Pentecost and the Monday following was a major holiday in Germany. What follows is primarily a report of the events I was able to attend.

The theme for this year's Festival was "Original? – Counterfeit?" and there were performances of a number of works attributed to Handel and, in most cases, no longer considered to have been composed by him. This was not an issue with the first concert I attended, which was a performance of the oratorio *Deborah* given on Thursday, June 1st in the Marktkirche by the choir and orchestra of the Capella Cracoviensis under the direction of Jan Tomasz Adamus. The tempos were on the fast side, which failed to faze the performers. The Polish chorus and orchestra were excellent, while the soloists were a more mixed lot. British soprano Rebecca Bottone in the title role sang well but never seemed to inhabit the character of Deborah. The countertenor Xavier Sabata as Barak was more successful dramatically and sang stylishly, although it was unclear whether his soft-grained voice projected further back in the church. Hasnaa Bennani was very impressive as Jael and in the one aria assigned to the Israelite Woman that she was assigned to sing. Michael Czerniawski brought a dramatic but rough-hewn bass voice to the role of the villain Sisera, but his English pronunciation was not acceptable. Overall one had the impression that *Deborah* contains a wealth of good music – both reused from the Cannons and Coronation Anthems and other works by Handel, and newly composed – but that the story, which culminates with Jael describing how she dispatched the sleeping Sisera with a hammer and tent peg, is hard to warm to.

Friday, June 2nd brought a staged performance of *Jephtha* at the Halle Opera. This was problematic, but not in the way that stagings of Handel's oratorios generally are. The usual problem involves having a static chorus on stage. This problem was "solved" by giving the chorus lots of things to do, generally upstaging the singing of the soloists. The problem specific to this production

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descriptions, written out in full by Handel but omitted by Friedrich Chrysander from his edition, demonstrate the extent to which Handel conceived of this as a potential work for the stage, and they give us an indication of what he was visualizing as he committed notes to paper.

As one works through the secondary manuscript sources in the editing process, there are other fascinating and often entertaining discoveries to unpack. The various copyists working in the John Christopher Smith circle of the mid-1740s produced not only other full scores (in addition to the three-volume performing score), but they also used secondary copies of the full score to generate instrumental and vocal parts that tell their own story. In some of the string parts, for instance, more than one scribal hand is evident, and a plausible picture emerges of an older copyist working ahead, setting up the clefs and key signatures on a few pages for the benefit of a younger, less-experienced copyist who then completed them. The latter scribe's lack of experience becomes evident in the greater frequency of mistakes and erasures, awkwardly drawn notes, or shakily written text, and yet there is something touching about the apparent process of learning and gaining of experience that remains visible on those pages.

I have been in the grip of a passion for old books and manuscripts since I was a boy, largely due to an enormous German pulpit Bible, printed in 1727, that from earliest memory always rested on a table in my minister father's study. A habit of rummaging through forgotten boxes in remote corners of junk and antique shops over the years has yielded many interesting additions to my collection of beautiful antiquarian bindings and treasured tomes, mostly centered around English history and literature (in more recent times, to the peril of my bank balance, I have discovered the convenience of Ebay). As I continued to investigate *Semele*, I felt the urge to look at early sources of William Congreve's libretto, first written for John Eccles in 1706. I was therefore delighted to discover a three-volume set of Congreve's complete works for sale a few years ago, a 1725 printing of the 1710 edition. The bookseller from whom I acquired this set had some interesting information to pass along about its provenance, since it had originally come from the estate of John William Willis-Bund, an English historian and Worcestershire politician who died in 1928. He had left his collection to the county library on his death, with the understanding that they would not sell any of it for at least 80 years. Most of the volumes had remained boxed up until they were acquired in 2008 by the bookseller with whom I was negotiating. He was especially pleased when I explained the motivation behind my Congreve purchase, and he pointed out to me

that I was in all probability the first person to have opened these volumes in over a hundred years. I have greatly enjoyed putting them to practical use.

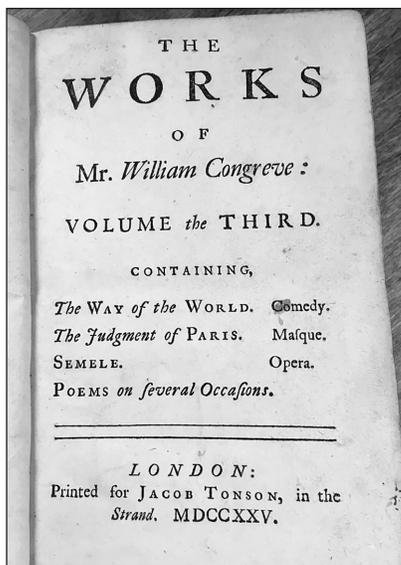
Reading this original 1706 libretto is an illuminating experience, since it contains a number of fairly racy passages that were omitted in Handel's 1744 version of *Semele* and lacks numerous others that his anonymous collaborator inserted, mostly using passages from other poems of Congreve. John K. Andrews's 2007 dissertation details these alterations and puts them in a social and

literary context; I merely point out, therefore, that Congreve had a great deal to say about the rejuvenating value of sleep after sex, and a broader familiarity with the poet's output on this topic casts *Semele*'s "O Sleep, why dost thou leave me?" in quite a different light. A complete read-through in my copy presents another sort of challenge and a glimpse of trouble in the bindery, since two pairs of folios (pp. 177–80 and 181–84) were accidentally wrapped around the outside of the eight folios into which they should rather have been inserted, in order to make the pagination continuous. Otherwise, all three volumes are in good condition, beautifully bound in tooled leather with boards and papers still intact. Their inside covers and flyleaves reveal a series of owners beginning with "Bridgett Rickards her Book" and the date 1726, the year after its printing. Each volume also contains a bookplate of one "Ste: Richardson," with the plate in Volume I dated 1755; Volume II contains an inscription on the second blank flyleaf tying it directly to the family of its most recent previous owner, "Thos. Bund" (undated).

My interest in *Semele* has quite naturally led me to attend numerous performances in Boston and New York over the last 20 years or so. The issue of whether "to stage, or not to stage" has obviously been with us for some time, and the responses of various presenters have yielded mixed results. There have been performances that straddle the dividing line between a straightforward concert and a fully staged opera by offering a semi-staged hybrid, allowing singers to make entrances and exits, such as the most recent Handel & Haydn Society performance last May (or so I'm given to understand, as I was unable to attend it). A much earlier Handel & Haydn production of the late 1990s included a few pieces of furniture on the stage as well as a few props, with entrances both from the front of the stage as well as the stage doors; while the singing was perhaps not everything one could have wished, this approach did give the presentation a theatrical edge.

The New York City Opera production of 2006 included a rather clever opening scene that hinted at this perennial question of genre: the set consisted of music stands and chairs for soloists placed along the front of the stage, with rows of seats for the chorus backed by a scrim slightly further upstage. The performers themselves wore conventional white tie and tails or concert dresses, and as the first act unfolded, the audience essentially saw and heard an oratorio performance. At the conclusion of the Act I quartet, however, the clap of thunder expressing Jove's displeasure caused the scrim to fall, the furniture to collapse, and the chorus to flee the ordered arrangement as they sang "Avert these omens." From that point, we were in a fully-staged operatic production which supplied fine singing but some annoying sight gags: it became clear that *Semele* was Marilyn Monroe, complete with skirt blown up *a la* "The Seven Year Itch," Jove was JFK, and Juno was Jackie O, complete with pink Chanel suit and pillbox hat. While some in the audience found this allegorical reading convincing, the imperfect layering of one famous trio on top of another seemed a needless complication. Furthermore, it was hard to feel much confidence in a rendition of "Myself I shall adore" that was sung without a trace of a mirror anywhere on the stage.

By far the most disappointing and puzzling *Semele* I have seen on stage occurred two years ago in a production directed by a performance artist with no operatic experience, produced by the Canadian Opera Company and performed at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. Reactions were mixed, with at least one critic claiming to have found the truncated ending – Buddhist priests sweeping *Semele*'s ashes off the stage following her final aria – rather affecting. The centerpiece of the production was a 17-ton Ming dynasty temple that had been reconstructed piece by piece on the stage; before the overture, there was a black and white film documenting its history and removal from China. Over the course of the performance, the audience was left with little guidance to understand what they saw, such as the two actors in a vaudeville



donkey costume with a six-foot phallus accosting various singers, or the pair of Sumo wrestlers engaged in a vigorous bout. And, one could not help but feel sorry for any listener who might have been hearing *Semele* for the first time, forced to depart without the chance to hear the last twelve minutes of music. The extraneous visual elements and drastic musical omissions, coupled with the decision to amplify the harpsichord in the pit so that it often drowned out the singing of recitatives, made for one of the more miserable evenings I have spent in a theater.

While directors will continue to exercise their taste and discretion in deciding how completely to stage *Semele*, one hopes they will scrupulously clarify the difference between comic moments and matters of great seriousness. An audience misled into laughter during a scene of grave import cannot really be blamed when the director has explicitly set them up to be amused. Congreve's text is clear and should be allowed to speak for itself, particularly because Handel's music dramatizes it in such a marvelous way. A wide swath of human emotions – from anxiety and jealousy to mirth and rapture – is offered to us in this work, regardless of the category in which we place it. Any presentation that goes beyond the conventions of a concert performance owes its audience the chance to engage with the text and music on their own terms. The wrestling should be kept to a minimum.

2017 INTERNATIONAL HANDEL RESEARCH PRIZE WINNER ANNOUNCEMENT



Left to right: Professor Donald Burrows, Professor Silke Leopold, the Prize winner Susanne Spiegler, and Professor Wolfgang Hirschmann

Halle (Saale) June 6, 2017

The Georg-Friedrich-Händel-Gesellschaft has this year for the third time awarded the International Handel Research Prize, funded by the Foundation of the Haale Sparkasse. The distinction goes to **Susanne Spiegler** of Leipzig for her Dissertation entitled **“George Frideric Handel in the Crosshairs of the Socialist Unity Party. The Exploitation of his Music in the German Democratic Republic.”** The study presents an important contribution to research on the reception history of the Halle-born composer. According to Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Hirschmann, the Chair of the Jury and President of the Händel-Gesellschaft, “Of special interest is the clear-headed analytical viewpoint which Ms. Spiegler brings to bear on the phenomenon, and in particular on the performing materials used in opera adaptations.” The Prize was presented on Tuesday, June 6, 2017 as part of the Opening Session of the International Conference “Between Original Genius and Plagiarist. Handel's Compositional Method and its Interpretations.” The Commendation was given by Prof. Dr. Silke Leopold of Heidelberg University.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

Händel-Jahrbuch 63 (2017) [select titles in English:]

- Beeks, Graydon. “‘These Delights If Thou Can'st Give’: A preliminary survey of the performance history of *L'Allegro ed il Penseroso* in England from Handel's death to the end of the 18th century,” 61–71.
- Bowdler, Sandra. “Handel's Operas in Australia, a performance history,” 237–251.
- Burrows, Donald. “Pomegranates and oranges: James Harris's philosophy and Handel's music,” 35–47.
- Eggington, Tim. “Universal Harmony in Enlightenment England: Handel and the Academy of Ancient Music,” 49–60.
- Jones, David Wyn. “‘What noble simplicity, what strength and, certainly, melody this music has’. Handel's reputation in Beethoven's Vienna,” 73–86.
- Rubinoff, Kailan. “From Populism to Professionalization: Changing Perceptions of Handel in the Twentieth-Century Dutch Early Music Revival,” 189–204.
- Huizenga, Tom. “300 Years of Handel's ‘Water Music,’ With a Splash of Politics.” *Deceptive Cadence from NPR Music Classical*, July 17, 2017. An interview with Nicholas McGegan. <http://www.npr.org/sections/deceptivecadence/2017/07/17/536493418/300-years-of-handels-water-music-with-a-splash-of-politics>
- Marx, Hans Joachim, and Steffen Voss. *The Compositions Attributed to G. F. Handel, 1700 to 1800*. Olms, Hildesheim, 2017.
- Landgraf, Annette. *Händels Israel in Egypt: Rezeptionsgeschichte von 1739 bis zur Mitte des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Beeskow: Ortus Musikverlag, 2017.
- Marx, Hans Joachim, and Steffen Voss. *The Compositions Attributed to G. F. Handel, 1700 to 1800*. Olms, Hildesheim, 2017.
- Timms, Colin, and Bruce Wood, eds. *Music in the London Theatre from Purcell to Handel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. [select titles on Handel:]
- Badham, Matthew. “‘Straight mine eye hath caught new pleasures’: Glancing and Gazing Spectatorship in Handel's *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato*,” 190–202.
- Barnouw, Jeffrey. “Lost Chances: Obstacles to English Opera for Purcell and Handel,” 49–65.
- Brown, Peter. “*Ombra mai fu*: Shades of Greece and Rome in the Librettos for Handel's London Operas,” 83–98.
- Cummings, Graham. “From Metastasio's *Alessandro* to Handel's *Porro*: A Change of Dramatic Emphasis,” 114–126.
- Gardner, Matthew. “Seventeenth-Century Literary Classics as Eighteenth-Century Libretto Sources: Congreve, Dryden and Milton in the 1730s and 1740s,” 157–174.
- Gorry, Liam. “Accompanied Recitative and Characterisation in Handel's Oratorios,” 203–221.
- McCleave, Sarah. “*Deidamia* as an ‘Heroi-comi-pastoral’ Opera,” 126–154.
- Pinnock, Andrew, and Bruce Wood. “*Alexander's Feast, or The Power of Perseverance*. Dryden's Plan for English Opera and its Near-fulfilment in a Handel Ode,” 66–80.
- Roberts, John H. “Handel, Charles Jennens and the Advent of Scriptural Oratorio,” 222–243.
- Smith, Ruth. “‘In this Ballance seek a Character’: The Role of ‘Il Moderato’ in *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato*,” 175–189.
- Strohm, Reinhard. “Handel and the Uses of Antiquity,” 99–113.

was that the stage director, Tatjana Gürbaca, wished to present a feminist, anti-war work. The fact that *Jephtha* as written by Morrell and composed by Handel was not such a work was dealt with by rewriting both the text and the music to allow Iphis to spurn the Angel's offer of life and choose death. There were other glosses, including having the Israelites portrayed as a sort of cult that elected to live plainly and give up other gods at the beginning of the evening, only to return to their earlier ways after the contents of Jephtha's vow were made known. There were also indications that Jephtha entertained impure thoughts about his daughter. Overall the most annoying thing about the production was the decision to delete and/or rewrite Handel's music at the end of the work – leaving aside the question of whether the quintet was written by Handel or Smith Jr. If the work as written does not demonstrate the director's chosen theme, is it too much to ask that director to find a work that does?

The singing and playing were more than adequate, but there was a sense that none of it was really committed; this was possibly related to Christoph Spering's generally clear but anodyne conducting. The Händel Festspielorchester played well, although there were too many occasions on which the organ was used during the recitatives. Many of the problems with the singing had to do with people being asked to do things that made singing difficult. For example, the tenor Robert Sellier as Jephtha was called on to slouch around the stage and his tone was often not supported. Svitlana Slyvia was an overly dramatic Storgè and her intonation suffered as a result. Ines Lex sang musically, but her attempt to play Iphis as a young girl often seemed "stagey." Ki-Hyun Park as Zebul displayed his impressive bass voice, although the effort to portray his character as the manager of Jephtha's political career seemed misguided. The countertenor Leandro Marziotte as Hamor sang efficiently but was unable to infuse the character with much substance. I found myself more annoyed at this production than I probably should have been. It is admirable of the Halle Opera to commit itself to a new production of a Handel work every year, whenever possible featuring editions of the Hallische Händel-Ausgabe (HHA) – in this case the work of Kenneth Nott. There have been some very good stagings in the twenty-five years I have been coming to Halle; however, there was something about the cynical rewriting of the end of *Jephtha* that seemed to me to place this production beyond the pale.

The annual Members Meeting of the Georg-Friedrich-Händel Gesellschaft took place on Saturday morning, June 3rd in the Stadthalle. It was preceded, as usual, by the Festival Lecture, which this year was a very interesting survey of Handel portraits – some authenticated and others not so securely identified – given by Dr. Edwin Werner, retired Director of the Händel-Haus in Halle. At the Members Meeting itself, I presented greetings from the AHS together with an invitation to join us at our next AHS Festival and Conference in 2019. The most significant event of the morning was the signing of an agreement between the three German Handel Societies – those in Halle, Göttingen and Karlsruhe – which will allow full members of one society to become concurrent members of one or both of the other societies for a reduced fee. I will discuss the implications of this new agreement to members of the AHS elsewhere in this Newsletter.

Saturday night brought a performance of the oratorio *Esther* in its 1732 version – the so-called *Esther II*. This is the expanded version of the work, originally written in 1718 for a private performance at Cannons, which Handel prepared for public consumption in London some 14 years later. *Esther II* includes a good deal of added music, including large parts of two of the Coronation Anthems from 1727 as well as the newly composed opening aria, "Breathe soft, ye gales." Annette Landgraf is preparing the edition of *Esther II* for the Hallische Händel-Ausgabe, which will also include later versions of the piece presented by Handel.

The performance was given by the ensemble La Risonanza, with the Choir of the Capella Cracoviensis making a second appearance. The conductor was Fabio Bonizzoni, who played the harpsichord during the recitatives and arias; the organ was appropriately confined to the choruses. Tempos seemed sensible and the orchestra and choir acquitted themselves creditably, although the English pronunciation of the latter seemed to me less assured than it had been in *Deborah*. Soprano Raffaella Milanese embodied the title role with confidence, but her diction was curiously muffled. Soprano Stefanie True, who is a native speaker, also seemed to have difficulty projecting the English text but produced a contrasting bright sound. The third soprano, Joanna Radziszewska (drawn from the chorus), was a real find. Countertenor Antonio Giovannini had neither the voice nor the stage presence to fill Senesino's role of Assuerus and was overpowered in all ways by bass Thomas Bauer's portrayal of the villain, Haman. Benedetta Mazzucato coped successfully with the dual roles of Mordecai and Habdonah, although her English pronunciation was far from stellar. Some of the lack of projection may have been owing to the variable acoustic properties of the Georg-Friedrich-Händel Halle, but the difficulties with English pronunciation were something else. Although Handel's Italian singers were criticized for their English in works such as *Esther II* and *Deborah*, it is surely taking historical performance practice too far to encourage such pronunciation in this day and age.

On Monday evening, June 5th, there was an excellent concert in the small Bartholomäuskirche where Handel's grandfather had been the pastor and where his parents were married. The Ensemble Polyharmonique, consisting of eight singers accompanied by theorbo and keyboard, presented a program consisting mostly of English anthems interspersed with Handel's brief settings of "Alleluja, Amen," sung by each of the singers in turn. The anthems included both of Handel's continuo settings of "As Pants the Hart," which provided a rare opportunity to compare them in performance. The rest of the program included several strikingly effective works by John Blow, Henry Purcell, and William Croft, as well as a Missa Brevis by F.W. Zachow which employed the Lutheran chorale *Christ lag in Todesbanden* as cantus firmus. The program emphasized the penitential to the exclusion of more celebratory repertoire, but the performances were excellent and the English pronunciation of the Continental singers was thoroughly convincing.

This year's Conference, which took place on Tuesday and Wednesday, June 6th and 7th, was organized around the theme "Between Original Genius and Plagiarist. Handel's Compositional Method and its Interpretations." The first day's sessions were preceded by the presentation of the 2017 Handel Research Prize to Susanne Spiegler for her work on Handel performances during the Cold War period, especially in the German Democratic Republic. The papers on the first day focused largely on the topic of categorizing Handel's borrowings, although Annette Landgraf began the sessions with a succinct introduction to contemporary attitudes towards those borrowings. Wednesday's papers focused largely on specific examples of borrowing. Donald Burrows and I discussed Handel's use of music from his Italian Psalms in his Cannons Anthems and his extensive revision of the Cannons Te Deum in B-flat Major, HWV 281, for use in the Chapel Royal as the Te Deum in A Major, HWV 282, respectively. Matthew Gardner considered the question of whether the self-borrowings in *Deborah* involved a careful selection of earlier works or were simply a matter of convenience. Teresa Ramer-Wünsche, Silas Wollston, and Jonathan Rhodes Lee discussed use of borrowed material in specific works from the 1730s and 40s, while Mark Risinger returned to the issue of categorizing borrowings in Handel's later works. Finally, John Roberts presented new discoveries of borrowings from the works of Ercole Bernabei in Handel's later fugal choruses.

Tuesday evening, June 6th, brought an opportunity to hear Handel's early Neapolitan Serenata *Aci, Galatea e Polifemo* in the Aula of the Martin Luther University. The conductor was Peter Neumann, leading his ensemble Collegium Cartusianum. Once again I had the impression that his best work is done in the later dramatic oratorios with a substantial choral contribution, but this was certainly an excellent performance. The soloists Julia Doyle, Luciana Mancini, and especially Andreas Wolf, in the extraordinarily wide-ranging bass role of Polyphemus, were outstanding. That the work came across as impressive rather than expressive can, perhaps, be attributed largely to Handel.

The last performance I attended was a staged version of the opera *Giustino* at the Goethe-Theater in Bad Lauchstädt on Friday evening, June 9th. The protagonists were represented onstage by the Marionettentheater Carlo Colla e Figli and were sung by soloists positioned in the side balconies. This should have been a successful approach for *Giustino*, whose libretto has the character of a story told around a fire on a winter's evening ("The simple farm boy, after seeing a vision, leaves his plow determined to become a great hero. On the way he meets a beautiful woman pursued by a bear. Our hero kills the bear and discovers that the woman is a princess" – and so it goes). That it did not quite work could be attributed to two things. In the first place – in this staging, at least – it was not possible to make the grotesque elements (e.g., the slaying of the bear, the appearance of the sea monster) anything other than comic; the element of danger was missing. In the second place, no matter how expressively the soloists sang their roles, the puppets were not expressive in themselves, so that one missed seeing the human element in the portrayal.

The best of the soloists was the countertenor Owen Willetts in the title role, and he was very good indeed. The rest of the singers, who included Fanie Antonelou as Arianna, Sylvia Rena Ziegler as Anastasio, Helena Rasker as Leocasta, and Andreas Post as Vitaliano, were only a little less successful. The musical direction was by Wolfgang Katschner leading his Lautten Compagnie Berlin. The performance was rapturously received by the audience and was what we have come to expect from Katschner, with shortened da capo arias, two lutenists where another stand of violinists might better have been used, rescoring of arias to permit extensive solo opportunities for the recorder player, and the addition of a variety of percussion instruments – who knew that Handel had written for the Baroque spoons? The local "fans" seem to be puzzled by the discomfort of international visitors who – rightly, it seems to me – found these alterations to be annoying.

I inevitably missed a number of concerts that looked interesting and/or received favorable reports. These included the Festival Concerts, which have become a major part of the Festival. This year they featured Ann Hallenberg, Xavier Sabata, Sonia Prina, Vivica Genaux, and Juan Sancho. There were also two performances of *Messiah*, the first directed by Jonathan Sells with a group of eight soloists performing both the solos and choruses and billed as the Dublin Version (although the performances in Dublin almost certainly involved a separate chorus). The second was a more traditional performance of the 1743 London version (which may very well have been sung at the first performances by a group of soloists) with Howard Arman, a favorite in Halle, conducting a group of soloists with the Bavarian Radio Choir and Concerto Köln. Also of note were a staged version of the 1718 *Acis and Galatea* at Bad Lauchstädt, again with puppets, this time provided by the Marionettentheatercompany Buchty a Loutky from Prague, and a concert performance of the pasticcio *L'Elpidia, ovvero li rivali generosi* by Opera Settecento in the Freylinghausen-Saal of the Franckesche Stiftungen.

Finally, in addition to many other concerts, lectures and opera performances, there were Excursions to three places outside of Halle. The first, to Eisleben and Mansfeld, focused on

the life of Martin Luther as part of the Luther 2017 celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. The second, featuring performances of Handel's *Terpsicore* and J.F. Rebel's *Les caractères de la danse* by the Hartig Ensemble, a historical dance troupe from the Czech Republic, accompanied by Musica Florea, involved a journey to Bernburg and its historic Carl-Maria-von-Weber-Theater, which was designed in the Classical style by Karl Friedrich Schinkel and opened in 1827 as the court theater of the Duchy of Anhalt-Bernburg. The third, focusing on the Residences of two branches of the House of Wettin, involved a visit to Merseburg, with its cathedral and castle, and then on to Weissenfels, with its castle and its museum honoring the 17th-century composer Heinrich Schütz, located in the house where he and his family lived. This last Excursion concluded with a concert of music written for the Ducal Court of Weissenfels and performed in the castle chapel by Cantus Thuringia and students from the Hochschule für Musik Franz Liszt in Weimar.

Next year's Handel Festival will run from May 25 to June 10, 2018 with the theme "Strange Worlds." The program will feature a new staging of the opera *Berenice* by the Halle Opera, and performances of the complete *Muzio Scevola* at Bad Lauchstädt, and the pasticcio *Oreste* in Bernburg. There will also be concert performances of the operas *Arianna in Creta* and *Rinaldo*, the serenata *Parnasso in festa* and the pasticcio *Ormida*. In addition, there will be opportunities to hear the oratorios *Messiah* and *Samson*, the latter directed by John Butt in its 1743 all-soloist version, as well as a program of music written for the Duke of Chandos and featuring a performance of the Cannons *Te Deum* on the 300th anniversary of its first performance. And, of course, there will be Festival Concerts, this time by Joyce DiDonato, Sophie Karthäuser, Magdalena Kožená, Nathalie Stutzmann, Julia Lezhneva, and Max Emanuel Cenčić. Tickets should go on sale in December 2017.

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 2, 2018.

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.

NIAN WANG WINS FIRST PRIZE IN HANDEL ARIA COMPETITION



The Handel Aria Competition is pleased to announce that first prize in the 5th annual competition, held on June 9, 2017 in Madison, Wisconsin, went to mezzo-soprano Nian Wang. Nian performed two fiery Handel arias, “Where Shall I Fly?” from *Hercules* and “Crude furie degl’ orridi abissi” from *Scerse*. Nian is a New York-based mezzo-soprano originally from Nanjing, China. She graduated from the opera program at the Curtis Institute of Music, and in 2014 was selected as a San Francisco Opera Adler Fellow.

Tenor Gene Stenger won second prize and audience favorite, while mezzo-soprano Clara Osowski took third prize in the competition.

Seven finalists, selected from a field of more than 100 singers, each sang two arias accompanied by the *Madison Bach Musicians* under the direction of Trevor Stephenson. Paul Rowe, Craig Trompeter, and Alessandra Visconti served as the professional judges for this year’s competition. Every finalist received some votes for the hotly contested audience favorite prize.

The Handel Aria Competition was established in 2013 to encourage emerging singers to explore the operas and oratorios of George Frideric Handel. It is held annually in Mills Hall of the University of Wisconsin-Madison Mead Witter School of Music. The competition, founded by Carol “Orange” and Dean Schroeder, was inspired by Mr. Schroeder’s passion for Handel’s operatic works.

FROM THE PRESIDENT’S DESK

Graydon Beeks

The AHS Conference at Princeton last April continues to elicit enthusiastic responses. Congratulations again to the Wendy Heller, who coordinated local arrangements, and Robert Ketterer, who chaired the Program Committee, and to their hardworking colleagues. Particularly gratifying was the participation of many Handelians from countries other than the United States. Because the cost of the conference turned out to be higher than anticipated, any monetary donations to the Society will be even more than usually appreciated.

I am pleased to announce that Ayana Smith, Associate Professor of Musicology at Indiana University, Jacobs School of Music, with a specialty in Italian Baroque opera, has accepted an invitation to join the Board of Directors of the AHS. Inspired by her background both in classics (B.A. with honors from Swarthmore College) and as a singer, Professor Smith focuses on intersections between literature, reception of the classical past, and interpretation. Additional training in art history has added new layers of interdisciplinary material to her research. She completed her M.A. and Ph.D. at Yale University under the direction of AHS Board Member Ellen Rosand. Professor Smith is the recipient of prestigious fellowships and has published numerous articles in highly regarded journals. Her current book manuscript, *Dreaming with Open Eyes*, investigates the importance of visual culture to theories of literature and music drama within the Accademia degli Arcadi in late seventeenth-century Rome. She will coordinate local arrangements for the AHS Conference at Indiana University in 2019.

As reported elsewhere in this issue of the Newsletter, the three German Handel societies have signed an agreement providing a financial incentive for members of one society to join either or both of the other societies. This means that AHS members who are also members of the G. F. Händel-Gesellschaft based in Halle, may become members of the Händel-Gesellschaft Karlsruhe and Göttinger Händel-Gesellschaft at half the cost of normal memberships and paid in dollars. It also means that members of the latter two societies who elect to join the G. F. Händel-Gesellschaft may also join the AHS by paying their membership dues in Euros to the Treasurer of the G. F. Händel-Gesellschaft in Halle. The AHS Secretary-Treasurer, Webmaster, and I are working on how to make these options available when the call for 2018 membership dues is issued later this year.

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);
- News of recent Handel-related events, presentations (special lectures or conference papers), and concerts organized and/or performed by members of the Society;
- Reviews of performances and recordings of Handel’s music;
- Information about awards and honors presented to members of the Society;
- News of recent publications;
- Abstracts for dissertations in progress on a Handel-related topic.

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

The American Handel Society

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The American Handel Society – Membership Form

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

Those paying in dollars or sterling should make their checks payable to THE AMERICAN HANDEL SOCIETY and mail them to Marjorie Pomeroy Kelly, Secretary/Treasurer, THE AMERICAN HANDEL SOCIETY, 49 Christopher Hollow Road, Sandwich, MA 02563. Those wishing to pay in Euros should remit to Stephan Blaut, Treasurer, Georg-Friedrich-Händel-Gesellschaft, Gr. Nikolaistrasse 5, 06108 Halle (Saale), Federal Republic of Germany, and indicate that the payment is for the account of the AHS. Friends of the London Handel Institute may also pay their AHS dues in sterling by making their checks payable to The Handel Institute and mailing them to Ms. Sylvia Levi, Hon. Treasurer, The Handel Institute, 254A Kew Road, Richmond TW9 3EG, with the appropriate annotation. Please do not send checks in Euros or sterling directly to the AHS as we are no longer able to process them.

Online payment options are available at <http://americanhandelsociety.org/Join.html>.

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

The American Handel Society

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